TROELS MYRUP KRISTENSEN

MAKING AND BREAKING THE GODS

Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Late Antiquity

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old tradition of discussing visual practices and the materiality of

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Making and

Breaking the Gods

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XII

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Making and

Breaking the Gods

Christian Responses to Pagan

Sculpture in Late Antiquity

Troels Myrup Kristensen

Aarhus University Press |

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Making and Breaking the Gods

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Cover. Head of Athena from Tel Naharon, dated

to the second century and buried in a pit in Late Antiquity, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, inv. IAA 78.505 (courtesy of the Israel Museum).

Back cover. The so-called “Guidi Head”, the head of the cult statue of Zeus from his temple at Cyrene, as reconstructed from numerous fragments (courtesy of Donald White).

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Acknowledgements

This book is a substantially revised version of my dissertation, *Archaeology of Response: Christian Destruction, Mutilation, and Transformation of Pagan Sculpture in Late Antiquity*, written in the Department of Classical Archaeology, Aarhus University, between 2007

and 2009, under the supervision of professor emeritus Niels Hannestad and professor

Lea Stirling. The dissertation was defended in December 2009; since then I have been

able to revise it and add some new material, although several important works arrived

too late to be taken into closer consideration (notably Verity Platt's *Facing the Gods. Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion*, Cambridge 2011, which adds much to our understanding of Greek and Roman cult statues). The

final rewrite was completed in the shady café of Bodrum Castle in summer 2012, and

only very minor adjustments have been possible since then.

One chapter dealing with Christian crosses on pagan statuary that formed part of

the original dissertation has been published separately (Kristensen 2012). Earlier versions of parts of this book have appeared in previous publications (Kristensen 2009,

which appears by permission of Joh ns Hopkins University Press; 2010a and 2010b).

The original dissertation also included an appendix on the diverse late and post antique treatment of Roman sculpture. However, since this appendix will soon be superseded

by the volume *The Afterlife of Roman Sculpture – Late Antique Responses and Practices* (Kristensen & Stirling forthcoming), I decided that it would be superfluous to include it here. The contributions to that volume, which is based on two seminars held in Aarhus

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*

All dates are A.D., except otherwise noted. Classical author abbreviations (where used) follow *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edition. Journal abbreviations in the bibliography follow the conventions of *L'Année Philologique*.

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INTRODUCTION

Driving Demons Away:

The World of Demeas

In a frequently quoted but rarely scrutinized late antique inscription from Ephesus, a Christian man named Demeas triumphantly announced the destruction of a statue of

Artemis to his fellow citizens (Fig. 0.1):

Having destroyed a deceitful image of demonic Artemis, Demeas set up this sign

of truth, honouring both God the driver-away of idols, and the cross, that victory-

bringing, immortal symbol of Christ.1

Found in 1904 and originally erected prominently in the centre of Ephesus near the

Library of Celsus, this unique inscription is widely believed to have reused a base that originally held a statue of Demeas' hometown's former patron goddess.2 His inscription, written in elegiac verse, thus appears to bear

direct testimony to the occasionally contested space of the late antique cityscape and a particularly Christian response to the images of pagan divinities that had been such an important part of Roman society,

1

[δαίμ]ονος Ἀρ[τέμιδος] καθελὼν | ἀπατήλιον εἶδος |

Δημέας ἀτρεκίης | ἄνθετο σῆμα τόδε |,

εἰδώλων ἐλατῆρα | θεὸν σταυρόν τε | γερέρων,

νικοφό|ρον Χριστοῦ σύν|βολον ἀθάνατον.

IEph 4.1351, translation slightly amended from Horsley 1992: 108. The stone on which it was inscribed is 90 cm tall and 54 cm wide. Initial publication: Heberdey 1905: 69-70. The inscription is also published in Benndorf 1906: 103-104 (dated as “jünger als fünfte Jahrhundert”); Grégoire 1922: 34, no. 104 (dated to *c*. 435, with reference to *CTh* 16.10.25); Keil 1931: 98; and Guarducci 1978: 400-401, no. 8 (proposes fifth-century date based on letter forms). Further discussion of the inscription can be found in Foss 1979: 32; 69; Arnold 1989: 27; Thür 1989: 129-131; Mango 1994: 97-98; Karwiese 1995: 132; Trombley 1995: I, 101-102; 2008: 155; Bauer 1996: 283; Strelan 1996: 85-86; MacMullen 1997: 52; Günther 1998: 26; Merkelbach & Stauber 1998: 334-335 (*c*. 400); Rothaus 2000: 112; Moralee 2006: 206; Bauer & Witschel 2007b: 6; http://laststatues.classics.

ox.ac.uk, LSA-610 (A. Sokolicek).

2 Thür 1989: Taf. 67 shows the findspot of the inscription. On the late antique urban context of Demeas’ inscription, see Foss 1979: 30-45.

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Fig. 0.1. *The Demeas inscription at*

Ephesus (photo: author).

religion, and visual practices in general.3 Reflecting the religious changes that had received major stimulus from the imperial patronage that Christianity gained during the

reign of Constantine, a pagan idol of Artemis (which other Christian sources refer to

as the “daughter of Satan”) had now been replaced by a cross.4

The destruction of such idols has played an important role in narratives of the

Christianization of the Roman world, both in the Christian tradition and modern

historiography. Indeed, responses similar to Demeas’ can be observed in a patchwork

of evidence, ranging from sources of questionable historicity, such as hagiographies,

to the idealized world of ecclesiastical history, as well as in the archaeological record, consisting of finds of mutilated and fragmented sculpture whose treatment can be extremely difficult to date, interpret, and not least correlate with historical evidence. The 3 David Morgan offers a useful definition of visual practice as “a visual mediation of relations among a particular group of humans and the forces that help to organize their world” (2005: 55). With the phrase “Roman visual practices,” I refer to all those engagements with images that can be observed in the Roman world (east and west).

4 Daughter of Satan: Wright 1968: 10 (*The History of Joh n, the Son of Zebedee, the Apostle and Evangelist*).

Introduction

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challenge that presents itself is how to read this complex evidence and to understand the conflation of rhetoric and reality that is implicit in much of it. The interpretation of Demeas' inscription is well suited to introduce the many different narratives into which this kind of evidence for a Christian response to pagan images can be placed, especially since its wider archaeological context has only rarely been looked at in any detail. It will thus here serve to outline some of the main topics of this book that investigates how Christians navigated the pagan sculptural landscape from the fourth to the seventh century (*i.e.* the period before Byzantine Iconoclasm).

It is difficult, if not impossible, to assess confidently whether a statue of Artemis ever really did stand on top of the base that Demeas reused for his inscription, as the top part of the base has been damaged, making it hard to detect any traces of what it once supported.5 Yet two holes (one deep and rectangular, the other more shallow and square) can clearly be discerned, indicating that it could well have supported the cross that is mentioned in the inscription (Fig. 0.2). Such a cross may have been made of wood or

at least have had a wooden core; it has not survived. Whether the base was reused is

rather less clear, as no signs of the original inscription or description can be discerned.

If the base had previously supported a statue of Artemis, it certainly could not have

been the main cult image from her majestic temple outside of the city walls (though we lack its precise dimensions, this is generally understood to have been a colossal statue, made of wood and adorned with rich textiles).6 But many other statues of the Ephesian

Artemis abounded in the cityscape, urban sanctuaries, and public buildings, similar to how we see her reproduced across the Roman world in different sizes, forms, and media, and it is a distinct possibility that it is the destruction of one such image that Demeas refers to.7 The phrasing of the inscription, which refers to the image only in very vague, indirect, and derogatory terms (δαίμονος, εἶδος and εἰδώλων), does not give us much

confidence that the original image could be identified. If the inscription is not a reused statue base, we cannot simply assume that it refers to the destruction of a representation of Artemis in the round or that all such images were purged by the early fifth century.

Nor can we assume that the image in question belonged to the category of cult statue

in our traditional sense. The inscription could even theoretically be an entirely rhetorical 5 Thür 1989: 129. As Thür notes, the idea that the base had once supported an image of Artemis emerged already with the first publication of the inscription. The height of the inscribed block (90 cm) would make it a relatively low statue base (of the orthostat type), but does not rule out such an identification, see Højte 2005: 27-34; Fejfer 2008: 25-27.

6 On the fate of the Temple of Artemis, see Foss 1979: 86-87. On the Ephesian cult statue of Artemis, see Fleischer 1973: 1-137; *LIMC* II (1984): 755-763 (R. Fleischer); LiDonnici 1992. On the role of cult images of Artemis in the religious and political life of Ephesus, refer to Elsner 2007: 228-242.

Mussies 1990a: 194 notes that the inscription is “in pentameters and therefore in the epic dialect which does not use definite articles. The reference here might then be to *the* Artemis-statue, but of this we shall probably never be certain.” This statement, however, disregards the archaeological evidence.

7 Chapter 1 will discuss the nature of such replication of cult statues that fuelled a particular system of visual practices.

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Fig. 0.2. *The top of the Demeas*

inscription, Ephesus

(photo: author).

construction that allowed Demeas to take credit for the semi-mythical destruction of

a cult image, similar to how Joh n Chrysostom and many other saints acquired special

veneration and status in relation to episodes of iconoclasm, especially in cases where they were regarded as having played an important role in the conversion of a community.8

The layers of rhetoric that clearly are embedded in Demeas' inscription should then at the very least raise some caution in its use as a source for understanding the interaction between different religious groups in Late Antiquity. What may we then learn from this inscription?

Hilke Thür has suggested that the Artemis referred to in the inscription belonged to

the sculptural decoration of the Gate of Hadrian, in front of which the inscription was placed.9 This is an attractive suggestion and finds a parallel case in Aphrodisias, where an image of Aphrodite was removed from the Tetrapylon and replaced by a carving

of a cross, perhaps when it was restored in the early fifth century.10 Other evidence

also points to the fact that the Gate of Hadrian received a Christian 'overhaul' in Late Antiquity, as it came to be adorned with several large crosses (similar to many other

monuments on the Curetes Street) and Christian inscriptions on the northern facade.11

8 On Joh n Chryostom and the cult image of Artemis, see Foss 1979: 34-35.

9 Thür 1989: 129-130.

10 Smith 2012: 319.

11 Thür 1989: 126-128; and see Plan 13.

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One of these inscriptions is an acclamation to the emperor on behalf of one of the main circus factions which indicates that the gate was a place for popular expression.12

The late antique Gate of Hadrian was a perfect space for venting popular sentiment,

which certainly does not lessen the rhetorical impact of Demeas' inscription. We should imagine that the audience for the inscription was to be found among those who moved

through the gate as part of their daily business. As the back side of the inscription was left rough and unfinished, the base was made for display in a setting where only three sides were visible, which fits well with its placement immediately adjacent to one of the pillars of the gate. The location of this gate, leading traffic away to the southeast of the Curetes Street and the *piazza* in front of the Library of Celsus, furthermore underlines its topographical significance and the dedicator's desire to make a potent visual statement in the cityscape.

When did Demeas erect his monument? This question is of major importance to the

interpretation of his inscription and of the degree to which it reflects religious conflict on the ground; alternatively, it could instead be seen as a rhetorical exercise that fed off the Christian triumphalism of the age. The best internal evidence for dating the inscription is analysis of the letterforms, which seems to suggest a late fifth century date, notably from features such as the cursive delta, but unfortunately lacks clear comparanda.13

Stylistic traits also only provide a general fifth or even sixth century date.14 Given this lack of a secure chronological point of reference, scholars have relied on external evidence and assumptions concerning paganism's presence in the late antique cityscape. Several

epigraphers have thus dated the inscription to *c*. 435, the year that an imperial edict against idolatry was issued, but the impact of this anti-pagan legislation has generally been overestimated, and it is highly unlikely that it can provide us with a date in this case.15 Others have argued that it would be unlikely that a statue of Artemis would have been standing in the cityscape for very long into the fifth century in Ephesus. Yet this view has to take into account both the nature of the image that Demeas takes credit

for destroying and the rhetorical character of his inscription.

If we accept a date early in the fifth century, Demeas' statements would have been

provocative, tapping into the dangerous waters of contemporary religious conflict, and mirroring such famous events as the destruction of the Alexandrian Serapeum in 392 (see 12 This acclamation is likely to have been partially altered in 609/10, see A. Cameron 1976: 148; Thür 1989: 128-129.

13 On letterforms, see *ALA2004*: http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004/narrative/script.html. I am grateful to Charlotte Roueché for helpful suggestions as to the dating of the Demeas inscription.

14 Trombley notes that the stylistic evidence does not exclude a date in the late fifth century or perhaps even in the sixth century (1995: I, 101-102).

15 “Omnibus sceleratae mentis paganae exsecrandis hostiarum immolationibus damnandisque sac-rificiis ceterisque antiquiorum sanctionum auctoritate prohibitis interdicimus cunctaque eorum fana templa delubra, si qua etiam nunc restant integra, praecepto magistratuum destrui colloca-tioneque venerandae christianae religionis signi expiari praecipimus, scientibus universis, si quem huic legi aput competentem iudicem idoneis probationibus illusisse constiterit, eum morte esse multandum” (*CTh* 16.10.25).

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Chapter 2) or Porphyry’s iconoclastic activities at Gaza in 402 (see Chapter 1). However, if it dates to later in that century, or even some time in the sixth (which the letterforms do not disprove), the factor of religious conflict with pagans would in some ways have been less pronounced and certainly of a rather different character. That is not to say that religious conflict is not observable in the late fifth century (events in Menouthis in Egypt in 489, for example, suggest otherwise, as we shall return to in Chapter 2), but that the social environment in which Demeas made his inscription would have been

rather different and followed a triumphalistic vein that also is seen in contemporary

texts. In the sixth century at Ephesus, the church that had been built inside the Temple of Artemis was greatly enlarged, and Christianity had thus once and for all usurped one of the most revered pagan cultic places in Asia Minor. In this light, Demeas’ inscription would have been more of a matter of fact statement than a provocative confrontation

with the city's remaining pagan population.

The Gate of Hadrian was under all circumstances still standing in the first decade of

the seventh century, although it is less clear whether it survived an earthquake dated to between 612 and 616.16 To me, it seems most likely that the inscription was set up in the second half of the fifth century. This suggestion fits both the available epigraphic and archaeological data and makes no assumptions about the presence, or indeed absence,

of pagan imagery in the cityscape at this time. I furthermore consider it a distinct possibility that the inscription refers to the removal of the image of the Ephesian Artemis in the fifth century, either on the Gate of Hadrian or in its vicinity, as part of the Christianization of this urban gateway. As such, it represents a rhetorical negotiation of Ephesus' pagan past by exploiting the language of anti-pagan polemic, but at the same time it also reflects a very real measure to remove pagan imagery from public view and thus to drive demons away, as its dedicant makes perfectly clear in his inscription. Certainly this particular statement must have resonated with contemporary Christian sentiments.

Elsewhere in Ephesus, other acts of erasure similar to the one Demeas took respon-

sibility for can be observed, but are no less difficult to date. Nearby in the Academy Street, an image of Artemis on a pier was defaced.17 Another relief in the western passage through the Mazaeus-Mithradates Gate was also mutilated at an uncertain date.18 In

the city's Harbour Baths (the *Thermae Constantinianae*), renovated in the mid-fourth century and still in use in Late Antiquity, a statue base from the Atrium presents another example, as the name of Artemis has here been erased.19 In this bilingual inscription, the name of the goddess had been removed in the Greek text but survived in the Latin.20 Further examples of the erasure of the names of gods are found in inscriptions

16 Thür 1989: 129.

17 Fleischer 1973: 23, E 76.

18 Fleischer 1973: 23-24, E 77.

19 Heberdey 1898: 76; Foss 1979: 59-60; 69. Full text of this inscription is published in Betz 1970: 29-30.

20 The Latin inscription presumably survived because the person responsible for the erasures was unable to read it.

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from, amongst other places, Aphrodisias and Epidauros.21 From this evidence, it would seem that Demeas' response was rather typical of his times, and erasure of images and

inscriptions an ordinary method of publicly denouncing paganism and calling forth

a new Christian public image. In the case of Aphrodisias, the procedure even became

a means of civic re-identification and explicit distancing from its own past when the

city changed its name to Stauropolis ("City of the Cross") in the sixth century, at a

moment in time when its Temple of Aphrodite was converted to a church.22 But at

neither Aphrodisias nor Ephesus did this process result in the termination of sculptural display. Notably, excavations at Ephesus in 1903 revealed

that selected reliefs with figural scenes from the so-called *Partherdenkmal* had been reused in a late antique fountain on the steps leading up to the Library of Celsus, immediately next to the Gate of Hadrian where the Demeas inscription was located.23

The wider context of Demeas' response, the process of Christianization as it unfolded

across the Mediterranean, encompassed both continuity and change.24 It heralded a

religious transformation that affected many aspects of society, but only slowly and

through a complex process of appropriation of the pagan past.25 This transformation

has nonetheless frequently been viewed through the lens of the 'triumph' of Christianity over paganism. The pervasiveness and influence of this view can be demonstrated by two very different examples that both attest to the victorious symbolism of the cross, which is evident in Demeas' inscription. The first is a hagiography of the seventh-century St.

Alypius in which we learn that this stylite saint removed an image of a strange animal (ταυρολέων, half bull and half lion) that sat on top of a funerary column and replaced it with a cross and an icon of Christ.26 One image had thus usurped another.

21 Jones 1981 publishes an agonistic epigram from Aphrodisias where Ζεὺς (line 4), Πύθια, and Ὀλύμπια (both line 9) have been erased. From Epidauros comes an altar with a large secondary carving of a cross and where the inscription naming Asklepios has been erased, see Peek 1972: 30, cat. no. 44; Abb. 26-27 and Trombley 1995: I, 119.

22 In an inscription on the north-east city gate, "of the Aphrodisians" was replaced with "of the Stauropolitans," cf. Roueché 2007: 187. On the Archive Wall in the theatre, the city's name was also erased, probably

sometime between the mid-sixth and the mid-seventh century, see ibid.: 187-188, 190; Reynolds 1982: xv–xvii; and now also Chaniotis 2008.

23 Foss 1979: 65; Bauer 1996: 281-282; Oberleitner 2009: 39; II, Abb. 34.

24 On Christianization in general, see Lane Fox 1986; Trombley 1995: I–II; MacMullen 1997; and Bowes 2008a with extensive recent bibliography. On religious conflict in Late Antiquity, see Croke & Harries 1982; Brown 1998; Gaddis 2005. On Christian response in the wider context of Christianization, see esp. Trombley 1995 (see index, “idols, desecration of”). In recent years, several scholars have criticized the term Christianization for its teleological leanings, see Bowes 2008a: 10 and Dijkstra 2008: 16. However, I find the term useful to describe the process of religious change.

25 A process that has been eloquently discussed in Bowersock 1990.

26 Ὅμως προσδιατρίψαντες τῷ τόπῳ οἱ ἄνδρες, τί μικρὸν ἰδέσθαι τὸ πέρας βουλόμενοι, ὡς

μετάσιον αὐτὸν ἐφ’ ἕνα τῶν ἐκεῖσε τύμβων γενόμενον ἐθεάσαντο, αὐτοὶ μὲν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἑαυτῶν

οἴκους ἀνέστρεφον φεύγοντες · τῷ δέ τύμβῳ κίων ὑπῆρχεν ἐφεστηκὼς ἐπ’ ἄκρῳ τῆς κορυφῆς

ἱδρυμένον ἔχων ταυρολέοντα…Ταῦτα καὶ τούτων ὑφ’ ἡδονῆς πλέον εἰπὼν ἐπὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ πόλιν

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Fig. 0.3. *Tomasso Laureti,* Triumph of the Faith over the Pagan Idols *(1585) (photo: author, by permission of the Musei Vaticani).*

Tommaso Laureti's monumental painting *Triumph of the Cross*, dating to 1585, almost a thousand years later than Alypius, evokes a strikingly similar scenario (Fig. 0.3).27 The painting, which adorns the ceiling of the Sala di Costantino in the Vatican, glorifies the achievements of Constantine; using a dazzlingly illusionistic perspective, Laureti shows the fragments of a statue of Mercury lying shattered on the floor, while a crucifix is triumphantly depicted on the pagan statue's pedestal. The use of the cross as a sign of a victory had, of course, become widespread following Constantine's defeat of Maxentius

at the Milvian Bridge, and crosses on top of pedestals frequently appear on Byzantine

coins as a symbol of victory.28 Seen in this light, Demeas' inscription fits well into a particular kind of triumphal tradition. This book, however, aims to demonstrate that

ἐξέδραμεν καὶ ἄρας εἰκόνα δεσποτικὴν καὶ μοκλὸν σιδηροῦν, εὐθέως ἐπανελθὼν ὑπέθηκεν τῷ

λέοντι τὸν μοκλόν · ἔστι γὰρ περιπληθὴς καὶ βαρύτατος · τῷ δὲ μόκλῳ ἑαυτὸν καὶ στένων καὶ

κοπιῶν μόλις ἴσχυσεν καταβάλαι τὸ ξόανον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἦν γὰρ καὶ κραταιὸς μακάριος ἀκμάζων

νεότητι – ἀντανίστησι καὶ ἀνυψοῖ τὴν ὄντως οὖσαν τῶν ζώντων κραταιοτάτην σημείωσιν, τὸ

τρόπαιον τοῦ σταυροῦ καὶ τὸ τοῦ Κυρίου ὁμοίωμα, ὅπως ἂν ἡ τοῦ τυράννου πολέμιος στρατιὰ

νῦν ἀδεῶς τῇ ἐνεργείᾳ τῶν θείων δυνάμεων γελῷτο καὶ παίζοιτο (*Vita S. Alypii Stylitae*, 9.1-5, 16-26, ed. Delehaye, summarized in Saradi-Mendelovici 1990: 55; Saradi 2008: 131-132).

27 This painting in the Palazzo Apostolico is sometimes also known as *Triumph of the Faith over the Pagan Idols*.

28 Byzantine coins: Grabar 1957: figs. 2-3; 6; 8-30; 36; 38-55; 64. On the function of the Cross in Christian response, see also Kristensen 2012.

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there is a lot more to this particular response than Christian rhetoric even though that it in itself constitutes a very important and worthwhile topic.

The basic premise of this argument is that there is meaning to be ‘excavated’ from

Christian responses to pagan sculpture in the period from the fourth to the seventh century.29 More than mindless acts of religious violence by fanatical mobs, these responses are revelatory of contemporary conceptions of images and the different ways in which

the material manifestations of the pagan past could be negotiated in Late Antiquity.

Statues were important to the social, political, and religious life of cities across the Mediterranean, as well as part of a culture of representation that for centuries had been intricately bound to bodily taxonomies and ritual practices.30 Looking at the diversity and development of Christian responses to pagan images thus also allows us to follow

the ways in which society changed in Late Antiquity, and how new social and religious

identities were forged. Instead of regarding Christian narratives of the destruction of pagan images as triumphal fantasies or straightforward historical sources, I here explore this evidence as part of the discourse of religious conflict and a rhetorical field of response that is of great importance to how Christians imagined and represented the (pagan) past for their own purposes. Christian visual culture did not come to encompass statuary as its preferred form of representation, but it used the genre vehemently to construct topoi of idolatry.31 In this sense, we are also witnessing a particular late antique construction of pagan visual practices that is of great importance to how modern scholarship has

approached and interpreted them today.

This book aims to reconstruct the world in which Demeas' response to the statue of

Artemis was situated. It approaches this through critical readings of Christian texts of the period, but just as importantly by paying closer attention to archaeological finds of fragmented sculpture from the eastern Mediterranean, primarily Egypt and the Near

East. The archaeology is informative of a wide range of Christian responses to pagan

sculpture in Late Antiquity that are not attested to in texts. Combining these two categories of sources (text and archaeology) is far from easy, but ultimately necessary to understand fully the significance and meaning of Demeas' response. Written sources give us information that archaeology is rarely able to uncover, such as a cast of individual agents and a datable narrative, occasionally authored by eyewitnesses who were present as events unfolded. This is the strength of Demeas' inscription, but also the bait that we today may be too tempted to take, as these texts rarely (if ever) can be accepted

at face value. The inscription seemingly provides a clear sense of the agent behind the destruction of a pagan statue as well as the why and when of his actions, although we

do not possess any further information about this particular individual – whether he

29 This period roughly starts with the conversion of Constantine the Great and ends before the rise of Islam and the beginnings of the Byzantine Iconoclastic controversy which experiences intense discussions of the representation of the divine.

30 On classical cities as "cities of sculpture," see Beard & Henderson 2001: 83. On the role of statues in Roman society, see in particular Stewart 2003; Fejfer 2008.

31 Kristensen forthcoming a.

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operated entirely on his own behalf, or why he chose to announce his actions in this particular fashion, for example. Yet in most other cases, we do not even have names

or any other detailed information about how individual Christians responded to the

display of pagan divinities in the visual landscape of Late Antiquity. Archaeology, on the other hand, provides us with a rich data set of sculpture that may have been mutilated by (nameless) individuals or groups at some more or less elusive point in history. The chronology and agency behind their treatment is mostly less clear than in the case of

written sources, but they play an important role in deconstructing the textual evidence as well as revealing the full spectrum of Christian responses, incorporating both curatorial appropriation (of not only complete but also incomplete statues) and selective

destruction of statues to ward off their perceived powers.

Let us briefly return to Demeas and take a closer look at the different ways in which

his response can be read in light of these observations. The social and religious context of Demeas' inscription to the image of the "demon" Artemis (δαίμονος Ἀρτέμιδος)

can be illuminated by contextualizing his response with the aid of a number of other

sources.32 His act of replacing the pagan statue with a cross is a measure that is not only in accordance with the triumphalism of many Christian authors of his age: it also resonates with the legislative measures of the Theodosian Code, the collection of imperial edicts commissioned during the reign of Theodosius II. As mentioned previously,

several scholars have even used this evidence to date Demeas' inscription. While I would argue that the Theodosian Code cannot be used in this way

to date the inscription, it

still provides us with some insight into how the kind of attack that it mentions could have been perceived. The aforementioned edict, issued in 435 by the emperors Theodosius and Valentinian, stipulated that all active pagan "fanes, temples and shrines…shall be destroyed by the command of the magistrate, and shall be purified by the erection

of the sign of the venerable Christian religion."33 This is the cross, the "sign of truth"

that Demeas refers to in his inscription. By erecting a cross on the base of the statue of 32 The use of the term δαίμονος (which, it also must be noted, is partially reconstructed) here requires some comment, as it does not necessarily have the same negative meaning that it certainly has in later Christian usage. Clinton Arnold is of the opinion that it did (1989: 27), a view that was challenged by Rick Strelan (1996: 83-86), who points out that "it is misleading to translate δαίμων as 'demonic'…because that word carries for many modern readers, like Arnold, ideas of 'evil'. It is possible that by the fifth century it *did* carry such associations for Christians, but this is not necessarily the case, and it certainly had a far broader meaning in the first and second centuries when demons could be either good *or* evil" (ibid.: 85, original emphasis). Artemis is also referred to as a δαίμων in the *Acts of Joh n* (43), but, as Strelan points out, perhaps not in the sense of "evil." On the seemingly neutral meaning of this term, see Ferguson 1980: 33-67.

However, in the context of Demeas' removal of a pagan statue (εἰδώλων), at the very least the use of the term here alludes to the false nature of the worship of Artemis. Strelan similarly criticizes Horsley's translation of ἀπατήλιον as deceitful and notes that the use of this term "is not the same as saying the Christian Demeas thought Artemis to be satanic or evil" (1986: 85).

33 *CTh* 16.10.25, trans. Pharr. On the attitude of the Theodosian Code towards pagan images, refer to Chapter 1, "Breaking the Gods: Christian Perspectives."

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Artemis, he had conducted a rite of purification. Demeas' inscription thus fits neatly with the 'anti-pagan' measures of the Theodosian Code.

Demeas' response may also be understood as testament to a devout Christian's indi-

vidual agency and patronage in a period of religious change. For Demeas, part of the

motivation for the attack appears to have been the materialization of his own personal devotion to Christ in the shape of a large commemorative monument, announcing

his beliefs in the public sphere. The placement of the inscription at a busy intersection in the city appears to confirm this. In this light, Demeas' monument represents one

individual's response to the pagan past within the complex religious and social setting of Late Antiquity, one that still followed the traditional epigraphic habit of the High Empire and the traditional format of the epigram. Demeas' response may in this sense

even be said to be conventional, in spite of its aggressive posturing.

From a theological viewpoint, Demeas' removal of the statue of Artemis exemplifies

the most literal take on the Christian opposition to the practice of idolatry, the trait *par excellence* of paganism. The prohibition against the worship of manmade images is rooted in the Judaic tradition and repeated throughout the Old Testament.34 Several Christian apologists, such as

Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, fiercely attacked idolatry on this basis.35 However, archaeological finds, such as the discovery of the Dura-Europos synagogue and house church in the 1930s, radically changed our conception of Jewish

and early Christian attitudes towards images.36 Early Christian painting, notably in

catacombs in Rome and tombs in Thessaloniki and elsewhere, reveals a world of figural

representation that is a far cry from orthodox views on images in the period. Early

Christianity thus cannot be characterized as aniconic, but rather as anti-idolic: that is, deeply suspicious of images used for the purposes of cult. Late antique textiles from

Egypt also demonstrate the continuous flourishing of mythological themes and motifs,

such as Dionysus and his circle.37 The two-dimensional character of such depictions

clearly made them less suspicious in Christian eyes than the three-dimensionality of

round sculpture that more directly presented the opportunity for worship.

Similarly, since the 1980s a growing body of research on late antique sculpture in

the round has emerged, focusing on both new archaeological finds of sculpture (some

conveniently dated by accompanying inscriptions) and re-dating of old finds based

34 Old Testament: Deut. 5:8; 27:15, 32:17, 21; Jer. 2:11; Lev. 19:4; 26:1; 26:30; 1 Sam. 15:23; Isa. 41:29.

But see Finney 1994: 15-38. On the biblical prohibition of idolatry, see Besançon 2000, 63-108.

35 Clem. Al., *Protr.* 1. On Tertullian's attitudes towards idols, see Stroumsa 1998. More generally on Christian attitudes towards idolatry, see (among the vast literature) Bevan 1940; Besançon 2000, 63-108; Barton 2007; and contributions in van Asselt et al. 2007.

36 On the complexities of Jewish art, see Fine 2005. See Kelley 1994 and Levine 2000, 336-344, for discussions of art and iconoclasm in synagogues. On the Dura-Europos synagogue and its frescoes, see Kraeling 1956; on the imagery of its ceiling, see Stern 2010. On the frescoes' relationship to Christian art, see Weitzmann & Kessler 1990. On the house church and its frescoes, see Kraeling 1967. Recent works on representation in early Christian art include Finney 1994; Mathews 1999; Kessler 2000.

37 Friedländer 1945; Bowersock 1990: 41-53; Thomas 2007.

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on detailed stylistic analysis.38 This research has done much to nuance the traditional view, again strongly influenced by the (Christian) literary tradition, that the rise of Christianity resulted in an immediate termination of the production and display of

pagan sculpture. This suggests that a purely theological approach is not sufficient to understand the complexity of Demeas' response. His world was one in which sculpture

and other media with mythological representations were continuously produced, and

old statuary of a similar nature was still displayed in both public and private settings, even into the sixth century.

Our view of Classical sculpture today has been shaped by centuries of art historical

connoisseurship and the antiquarian framework of collecting. Classical sculpture is

traditionally categorized as ‘art’ and perceived as something very different from, say, Egyptian or Babylonian images that had magical or supernatural powers in certain

contexts. Yet looking at the writings of several Classical and Christian authors, one

observes not only an apparent familiarity with pagan sculpture but also some very de-

tailed arguments against the idea that images had powers of their own and in that sense were alive. Concepts of living images and divine presence in representations have been important aspects of religion and cult in many societies, including the Greco-Roman

world.39 The fear of images (iconophobia) is directly evoked in an edict in the Theodosian Code: “if any person…should suddenly fear the effigies which he himself has formed…

[he/she] shall be punished by the forfeiture of that house or landholding in which it is proved that he served a pagan superstition.”40 Much of Clement’s theological critique

argues against these popular beliefs of living images, and he tauntingly writes that “even monkeys know better than this.”41 Demeas also conjures up the demonic aspect of his

opponent, “the deceitful form (ἀπατήλιον εἶδος) of the demon Artemis.” *Daimones*

did not have a derogatory significance for pagans, but to Christians they came to be a dangerous force and potential threat. Iconophobia and the responses that follow from

it are therefore important in understanding the rationale behind his actions as well as those of his contemporaries. The destruction of images therefore poses questions as

to the way in which Classical statues traditionally have been studied and presents an

opportunity to discuss the diversity of visual practices in Roman, Egyptian, and Near

Eastern contexts, the main regional foci of this book.

The complexity of the issue becomes apparent in observing that divergent but not

necessarily contradictory views towards pagan images can be found in the work of late

38 Gazda 1981; Hannestad 1994; Stirling 2005; and Bauer & Witschel 2007 are four important contributions. See Hannestad 2007: 273-277 for a chronological overview of the development of this field of research.

39 On “living images,” see Dodds 1947: 63-64; Frontisi-Ducroux 2001 [1975]; Caviness 2003; Maniura

& Shepherd 2006.

40 “Si quis … metuens subito quae ipse simulaverit… is utpote violatae religionis reus ea domo seu possessione multabitur, in qua eum gentilicia constiterit superstitione famulatum” (*CTh* 16.10.12.2, trans. Pharr).

41 Clem. Al., *Protr.* 4.51, trans. Butterworth.

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antique authors, the Christian poet Prudentius (348- *c*. 413) being a case in point. In his hymns, he exercised some of the usual topoi on idolatry and ridiculed “you men who fashion idols, silly monsters (*monstra divos*) to adore,”42 while in the *Contra Symmachum*, his contribution to the discussion concerning the fate of the Altar (and statue) of Victory in the Roman Senate, he positioned himself as a patron of Roman cultural heritage and

wrote: “Let the statues, the work of great artists, stand clean: let them be our country’s loveliest ornament, and let no tainted usage steep the monuments of converted art in

sin.”43 In Prudentius’ attempt to mesh the pagan past with the Christian future, he made a key distinction between the aesthetic value of “converted” statues on the one hand

and idols used in worship (*decolor usus*, “tainted usage”) on the other. His choice of terminology reflects this, as he generally used neutral terms, such as *marmora* and *aera*, to describe ‘purified’ statues freed from sacrifice, whereas statues used in worship are, as expected, referred to as *idola*.44 Prudentius’ message was thus that in the late fourth century, a crucial period in terms of religious change in the Roman world, pagan statues, like human bodies, were presented with the option of conversion to the new faith. And

through conversion, stone bodies could be transformed into beautiful ornaments, free

from sin and idolatry. In fact, he appears to long for a future when both pagan altars and statues are part of the Christian heritage, writing in

another of his hymns: “Of

bloody sacrifices cleansed, / The marble altars then will gleam / And statues honoured now as gods / will stand, mere harmless blocks of bronze.”45

At all points in history, communities and individuals must negotiate their relation-

ship with the past. Recent work on memory has stressed how destruction and erasure

can never be simple acts of rupture with the past, which further complicates Demeas’

response. Indeed, one scholar has even pointed out that there is a degree of continuity between the practice of Christian destruction of statuary and earlier forms of response.46

There is additionally a transformative aspect to Demeas’ actions as he seems to have

reused the base of the statue of Artemis and replaced it with “the victory-bearing, immortal symbol of Christ.” In this way, his actions very literally live up to the words of the Polish satirist Stanislaw Lec, who once remarked: “When smashing monuments,

save the pedestals – they always come in handy.”47 Destruction can thus be part of a

42 “et throno regnans ab alto damnat infames deos / vosque, qui ridenda vobis monstra divos fingitis”

(Prudent, *Perist.* 1.68-69, trans. Eagan).

43 “liceat statuas consistere puras, / artificum magnorum opera: haec pulcherrima nostrae / ornamenta fuant patriae, nec decolor usus / in vitium versae monumenta coinquinet artis” (Prudent, *C. Symm.* 1.502-5, trans. Malamud, quoted here from Stirling 2005: 157). It is important to note

here that the gilded bronze statue of Victory itself may have been left standing in the Senate.

The discussion concerned the altar and consequently the possibility of sacrifice. On the conflict, see Sheridan 1966; Curran 2000: 191.

44 Stirling 2005: 157; 266, n. 118.

45 “Tunc pura ab omni sanguine / tandem nitebunt marmora. / stabunt et aera innoxia, / quae nunc habentur idola” (Prudent, *Perist.* 2.481-484, trans. Eagan).

46 Bowersock 2001.

47 Quoted from Remnick 2003: 61.

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vocabulary of religious and political expression that creates new meanings as much as it destroys old ones. This poses questions as to how destruction is to be interpreted in the archaeological record and what apparent acts of destruction and erasure can reveal about a particular community’s relationship to the past.

These introductory remarks have stressed that Demeas’ destruction of a statue of

Artemis should by no means be seen as the only possible response to pagan sculpture

among the Christian communities of Late Antiquity. Aside from destruction and mu-

tilation, Christian responses to pagan sculpture certainly also included indifference, reuse, and reinterpretation. This complicates our view of Demeas' response and requires further investigation of its significance. Not only is his method of commemorating the attack particularly striking (and very Roman), the attack itself represents a very specific response to social and religious change that cannot solely be explained by reference to biblical texts or imperial edicts. Demeas' world did not experience a unilateral process of religious and social transformation with Christianization as its ultimate outcome.

Destruction, mutilation, reuse, and active conservation of pagan statuary could all occur simultaneously in Late Antiquity, but were situated within different religious, social, and political environments, testimony to the multiple ways in which sculpture formed

a crucial component of Roman society and religion, even during this transformative

period. Evidence, such as Demeas' inscription, thus offers us glimpses into the rhetorical negotiation of this complex situation.

Frameworks

The present book aims to integrate textual and archaeological sources to reconstruct

a narrative context for Christian responses to pagan sculpture that are comparable to

that which was commemorated and triumphantly announced in Demeas' inscription

at Ephesus. It explores the social and religious contexts of these responses and investigates the Christian destruction, mutilation, and transformation of pagan sculpture

during Late Antiquity. What my introduction to Demeas' world has hopefully made

clear is the complicated nature of this response, where a very wide range of issues

intersect. In this section, I want to outline further the aims and scope of this volume, in which these issues are explored through a variety of approaches; before proceeding, however, it is necessary to discuss how the book relates to previous research in this

and related fields.

Responses to images have generally been studied though textual sources or by art

historians working in later historical periods, although these studies have been increasingly influenced by developments in psychology and neuroscience. David Freedberg's

classic work *The Power of Images* offered a wide-ranging contribution to the history and theory of response that has been extremely influential for later studies of the destruction of images.48 Freedberg presented a rich array of case studies in his exploration of 48 Freedberg 1989. His chapter 14 (378-428) is devoted to idolatry and iconoclasm. Before this publication, he had worked on Dutch iconoclasm during the Reformation, see Freedberg 1988.

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the broader field of visual practices, including examples from Greco-Roman Antiquity, but his underlying claim about the universality of the power of images (that he indeed suggests has been 'repressed' in Western culture) runs the risk of neglecting or at least downplaying the historical specificities of episodes of destruction.49 In that sense, Freedberg's book

is as much a study of psychology as it is of history.50 I would argue that a given response must be understood within its historical, religious, and social context rather than as biologically or cognitively predetermined. The cognitive approach can

certainly be fruitful to understand viewer responses and the impact that images have,

but it will not be adopted here. While I do draw on cross-cultural perspectives, the

aim here is not to place Roman visual practices within a psychological continuum that

exists outside of history; this study is instead deliberately contextual in its coverage of a specific time (Late Antiquity) and specific regions (Egypt and the Near East), as I

consider visual practices to be deeply dependent on local traditions. They are as such also best studied within these local contexts, although the question of universalism

versus particularism needs to be addressed in all cases.

The relevance of Freedberg's work has not been lessened by episodes of iconoclasm

in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s that in turn have inspired a wave of recent stud-

ies devoted to the destruction of images.51 David Morgan's contributions, notably in

The Sacred Gaze, have been important in summarizing this recent work and locating it within the emerging field of religious visual culture . 52 The strength of this book and other works such as Dario Gamboni's *The Destruction of Art* is that they emphasise the historical contexts in which iconoclasm has taken place, both as part of a rich rhetorical field and as an

act of physical violence.53 The contextual approach is perhaps most intricately applied in Richard Davis' *Lives of Indian Images*, which uses biographical narratives of images to evoke their changing social and religious roles, including when In the preface to the French edition of *The Power of Images* (Freedberg 1998), Freedberg states specifically that his work on Dutch iconoclasm directly led him to think more broadly about the responses that images provoke.

49 Freedberg 1989: 11. The use of the Freudian term 'repression' is, of course, in itself testimony to the psychological underpinnings of his study.

50 Indeed, his more recent work has moved into the fields of cognition and neuroscience, see Freedberg & Gallese 2007.

51 There is nothing new in the ways in which the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan and the colossal statues of Saddam Hussein in Iraq were integrated into polemical discourses, with global repercussions. The destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria had a similarly 'global' reach, see Chapter 2. On the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, see Flood 2002; Meskell 2002; Caviness 2003; Sauer 2003: 162-164; Holtorf 2005. Simpson 2010 is also bookended by discussion of Bamiyan.

On the demolition and abuse of statues of Saddam Hussein, see Freedberg 2003; Hillert 2004; Morgan 2005: 135-136.

52 Morgan 2005. His chapter 4 is devoted to iconoclasm (115-146).

53 Gamboni 1997. See also Wandel 1995; Caviness 2003.

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they are deliberately destroyed.54 Both Davis and Morgan have important things to say about how "ordinary" images (such as cheaply made

figurines, compare Fig. 1.4, and

illustrated books for mass consumption) take on religious meanings, providing impor-

tant subtlety to the study of Roman visual practices in which such images abounded in

both sacred and urban spaces. Although his focus is not on the destruction of images

per se, the historian Valentin Groebner also takes a historical perspective in his *Defaced,*

which investigates how a language of violence and bodily punishment emerged in the

Late Middle Ages . 55

Focusing more directly on the Roman context, several studies of response have been

devoted to the phenomenon of *damnatio memoriae,* a modern term coined to describe the deliberate defacement of portraits of individuals who had fallen from imperial grace as a way of condemning their memory.56 Interest in this phenomenon fits well with the

general tendency in Classical studies to focus more on politics than on religion, even when there have been documented cases of pre-Christian destruction as part of the

persecution of particular cults, such as the Bacchic cult. A heavily fragmented Bacchic terracotta throne from an underground cult room in Volsinii should probably be interpreted as a victim of this state-supported religious persecution of the Bacchic cult in 186

B.C.,57 and later, in the mid-first century B.C., the cult shrines of Isis were repeatedly destroyed, although we know less about the specific

context of the suppression of this Egyptian cult.58 Studies of Greek episodes of image mutilation and destruction have

also mostly focused on political aspects.59

Whereas earlier studies of *damnatio memoriae* focused on the textual sources, more recent work has systematically considered the archaeological evidence of mutilated statues and defaced inscriptions, as well as exploring the wider implications of this particular kind of response, notably to illuminate the role and function of the imperial portrait.60

This work is important for the present study in so far that the "signature" of Christian 54 Davis 1997. His chapter 3 discusses "Images Overthrown" (88-112). The biographic approach is in turn inspired by the work of Igor Kopytoff.

55 Groebner 2004.

56 The literature in this field has increased vastly in recent years. One influential early study is Vittinghoff 1936, which documents the historical sources; 13-18 focuses specifically on memory sanctions in relation to images. *Damnatio memoriae* incorporated a wide variety of other memory sanctions, not relating to images. Recent work that draws extensively on the archaeological record and epigraphy includes: Stewart 1999: 161-172; 2003: 267-278; Hedrick 2000; Varner 2000; 2001; 2004; 2005; 2008; Elsner 2003; Flower 2006; contributions in Benoist & Daguet-Gagey 2007; Galinsky 2008; Vout 2008. Gregory 1994 is mainly concerned with textual evidence. For another case of politically motivated mutilation of sculpture in a Roman context, see Clay 2004a.

57 Massa-Pairault & Pailler 1979; Massa-Pairault 1980.

58 Beard, North, & Price 1998: I, 161.

59 On fragmentation, mutilation, and destruction of Greek statuary, see Osborne 1985; Frel 1994; Keesling 1999: 512-518; Holloway 2000; Frielinghaus 2006; Kousser 2009.

60 Varner 2000; 2004; Prusac 2010.

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Portrait of a bearded man, possibly Macrinus,

Fig. 0.4.

c. 217-250 AD, Harvard Art Museums / Arthur

M. Sackler Museum, Alpheus Hyatt Purchasing

Fund, inv. 1949.47.138 (photo: author, by

permission of the museum).

response in many ways developed from the language of *damnatio memoriae* and other pagan memory sanctions, as pointed out by Peter Stewart and David Frankfurter.61

Portraits subjected to *damnatio memoriae* frequently exhibit similar damage to the kind of selective destruction that I will discuss below in relation to Christian practices.

A portrait of the emperor Macrinus, whose memory was condemned after his execution

in 218, demonstrates this well, as its eyes and nose have been purposefully mutilated

leaving an impression that is similar to many later Christian responses to pagan images (Fig. 0.4).62 Eric Varner has argued that such practices were informed by the abusive

treatment of criminals after execution and that imperial images in these contexts served as ‘body doubles’, due to a specific cultural understanding of the relationship between prototype and index, to use the influential terminology of Alfred Gell.63 Ritual ‘killings’

of sculpture are attested, for example, by the case of a small silver bust of Geta that has 61 See Stewart 1999: 172-181; 2003: 294-298; Frankfurter 2008b: 139.

62 Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, inv. 1949.47.138. On this portrait, see Varner 2000: 192-195, cat. no. 49; 2004: 278, cat. no. 7.12; 2005: 69.

63 Varner 2001; 2005. See also Stewart 2006. These points are explored further in Chapter 2, “Idols on Trial: Representation and Corporal Punishment.” Alfred Gell’s exploration of prototype and index is found in Gell 1998 and has since been widely debated, see contributions in Osborne & Tanner 2007.

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been heavily defaced.64 The conflation of prototype and index (image) is furthermore vividly invoked in Pliny’s description of the destruction of portraits of Domitian, who suffered *damnatio memoriae* after his death in 96 – an intense account that is presented from the perspective of the attackers and with the use of bodily analogies: “It was our delight to dash those proud faces to the ground, to smite them with the sword and

savage them with the axe, as if blood and agony could follow from every blow.”65 Other rites, such as the deliberate disposal of images in water, were also taken over from *damnatio memoriae* or inspired by a common conception of ritual violence.66 The disposal of images in drains constitutes another link between Christian and earlier practices. At Salamis, for example, a mutilated statue of Meleager was found deposited in a drain

in the late antique bath-gymnasium complex, its mutilation and subsequent disposal

having been dated by the excavators to the early Christian period (Fig. 0.5).67

Although active measures of forgetting were applied in *damnatio memoriae*, a desire to hold on to the identity of victims of memory erasure can simultaneously be observed.68

It can be said, then, that in *damnatio memoriae* as well as episodes of Christian destruction of statuary, it was seen as important "to remember to forget." This cultural logic was the rationale behind many statue mutilations that were part of *damnatio memoriae*, as documented in recent work.69 In these examples, the display of mutilated images

provided *loci* for forgetting, while simultaneously reminding viewers of the political nature of memory. Recent scholarship on *damnatio memoriae* has furthermore made it clear that we should not be surprised that early Christian destruction and mutilation

of pagan statuary was far from systematic in its execution. For instance, in the case of Domitian, whose memory Nerva systematically attacked, no more than 40 percent of

the extensive corpus of *c*. 400 inscriptions with his name were targeted.70 Christian responses should not be expected to be geographically more wide-ranging nor more

systematically implemented than their predecessors.

64 Hillert 2004.

65 "Iuvabat illidere solo superbissimos vultus, instare ferro, saevire securibus, ut si singulos ictus sanguis dolorque sequeretur" (Plin., *Pan.* 52.4, trans. Radice).

66 See, for example, a mutilated statuette of Caligula found in the Tiber: Lahusen & Formigli 2001: 126-127, cat. no. 69; Varner 2004: 225, cat. no. 1.3; Flower 2006: 152-153; Fig. 30. For an example of the Christian disposal of images into the Nile, see Chapter 2, "Iconoclasm and Triumphal Narratives in the Nile Valley." See also *The Suffering and Miracles of the Martyr St. Julian*, 6 (Van Dam 1993: 168). For another case, see Sauer 2003: 10-12 on the monks Columbanus and Gallus.

The practice of depositing ritually charged objects into water has a very long history, cf. Merrifield 1987: 97-101; Croxford 2003; Aldhouse-Green 2004: 24; 100; McColl 2009.

67 Salamis: Karageorghis & Vermeule 1964: 18f, cat. no. 8. See also Chapter 3, “Liminal Places and Christian Response at Scythopolis.” Intriguingly, the recently discovered (and recarved) colossal portrait of Constantine from the Forum of Trajan was also found in a drain, see Demandt & Engemann 2007: 103.

68 Hedrick 2000: 89-130; Elsner 2003; Flower 2006.

69 Varner 2001; 2005.

70 Flower 2006: 240-241. Only in Rome were his inscriptions more or less completely erased.

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Statue of Meleager from Salamis (after

Fig. 0.5.

Karageorghis & Vermeule 1964, pl. XVI, 2, by

permission of the Department of Antiquities,

Cyprus).

In spite of their similarities, there are a number of important distinctions to be made between *damnatio memoriae* and Christian responses. The portraits of an individual subjected to *damnatio memoriae* were to be removed from both the public and private spheres, whereas the edicts in the Theodosian Code that deal with pagan sculpture are

only concerned with statues used in worship. *Damnatio memoriae* was furthermore an empire-wide phenomenon that was centrally initiated and orchestrated (at least to some extent). The Christian destruction of pagan statuary was, on the other hand, a much

more localized phenomenon that must be studied at that level, allowing for many more

ambiguities and uncertainties in the responses that we observe. This is equally apparent in the case of another practice of religious intolerance that was adopted by Christianity, namely the burning of sacred books.71

Scholarship that has explicitly addressed Christian responses to pagan statuary in Late Antiquity has predominantly done so within the wider narratives of Christianization and 71 Sarefield 2006; Herrin 2009. During the events in Gaza in 401, pagan books were burned alongside the destruction of the statues, see Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 71.

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religious conflict, or focused on single episodes attested in textual sources.72 However, in recent years, a surge of especially articles but also a number of monographs that

explicitly address late antique Christian destruction of pagan statuary have appeared.

While several of these have focused exclusively on single monuments or individual sites, others have been more far-reaching in their coverage.73 Most ambitious (and polemical) in this regard is Eberhard Sauer, whose earlier work on the fate of Mithraic sanctuaries in Germany, Gaul, and Britain during the third and fourth centuries was followed by a

monographic study entitled *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred in the Roman and Early Medieval World*, which was in large part devoted to the Christian destruction of sculpture.74 The book draws extensively on the author's experience with material from the

north-western provinces (especially mithraea and Jupiter columns), but also extends to Egypt and the Near East, from which it compiles a rich array of mutilated and otherwise fragmented images. Sauer offers a maximalist view of Christian destructive responses,

stating that "the instances where we can point the finger clearly to either Christians or invaders are only the tip of the iceberg."75 At the same time, Sauer favours pragmatic reasons to explain why certain images were mutilated and others spared. He does not

deal with the wider issues of divine representation and what meanings particular images 72 Works that look at Christian response exclusively through the lens of textual sources include: Mango 1963; Majewski 1965; Kaegi 1966; Thornton 1986.

73 On Christian response at individual sites and regions, see Martroye 1924 (Vaison and Arles); Gerkan & Krischen 1928: 118-123 (Miletus); Adhémar 1939: 44-48; 81-85 (destruction and preservation of Roman sculpture in medieval France); Goodchild, Reynolds, & Herington 1958 (Cyrene); Karageorghis & Vermeule 1964; 1966 (both Salamis); Frantz

1965 (Athens); 1988 (Areopagus houses, Athens); Collins-Clinton 1977: 5-7 (Cosa); Pétracos 1981 (Rhamnous); Gregory 1986

(Athens); Merrifield 1987: 96-106 (Britain); Greenhalgh 1989: 204-205 (Gaul); Strocka 1989 (Ephesus); Smith 1990; 2012 (both Aphrodisias); White & Monge 1992; White 2006 (both Cyrene); Caputo 1998; 2009 (Cumae); Riccardi 1998 (Sparta); Vorster 1998 (Rome); Cozzolino 1999: 25-31

(headless statue from Puteoli, found in a third- to fifth-century dump); Schütte-Maischatz & Winter 2000; 2001; 2004; Winter 2000 (Doliche in Commagene); Rothaus 2000: 105-125 (on Corinth); Marin 2001 (Narona); Romo Salas 2001; 2003 (both *Astigi*/Écija, Spain); Schmid 2001

(Eretria); Themelis 2001 (Messene); Stirling 2005 (Gaul); Deligiannakis 2005: 404 (Messene); 2008 (Rhodes); Fejfer 2006: 90-95 (Cyprus); Auinger & Rathmayr 2007 (Ephesian baths and *nymphaea*); Coates-Stephens 2007: 173-176 (Rome); Pollini 2007 (Parthenon); Frankfurter 2008a; 2008b (both Egypt); Tsafrir 2003; 2008 (Palestine); Kristensen 2009 (Egypt); 2010a (Alexandria); 2010b (Near East); Riccardi 2009: 57 (Athenian Agora); Jacobs 2010 (Asia Minor); Kousser 2010

(Germany). Broader in their geographical coverage are Hannestad 1999; 2001; Stewart 1999; 2003: 290-298; Caseau 2001; Pollini 2008; Trombley 2008; Kristensen 2010c.

74 Fate of Mithraism: Sauer 1996. The book deals explicitly with the destruction of the sculptural decoration of mithraea on pp. 37-40; 66-69; 92. Archaeology of religious hatred: Sauer 2003, see reviews by Clauss 2004; Clay 2004b; Frend 2004; Croxford 2005; Platt 2005; O'Sullivan 2006.

Noelke 2006 reviews the evidence for the destruction of Jupiter columns in the German provinces and dismisses Christian agency on chronological grounds (*contra* Sauer 2003: 55-57). See also the reservations of Bowes 2008b: 597 on attributing damage to statuary in Gaul to Christian hands.

75 Sauer 2003: 44.

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carried in religious practices. Most importantly, Sauer does not sufficiently address the ambiguity that was inherent in Christian response, and his coverage of Egypt and the

Near East in particular does not fully integrate the archaeological and historical evidence that would allow a more nuanced reading of these particular regions. In contrast, the

approach taken in this study is that Christian responses were not random, but rather

carried very specific meanings that are revelatory of contemporary visual practices.

This book is conceived as an archaeological contribution to the history of response.

The approach is inspired by, but also deliberately diverges from recent scholarship on viewing that has investigated the ways in which individuals engage visually with a

monument or artwork.76 Research on the ancient viewer has the great advantage of em-

phasizing difference and the multiplicity of readings, yet the term ‘viewing’ also denotes a distancing between object and viewer, a way of engaging with art that is distinctively modern and Western in origin. Furthermore, as explicitly acknowledged by Jas’ Elsner

in the introduction to his *Art and the Roman Viewer*, the ‘viewer-centric’ approach has in many ways been reliant on a particular kind of elite

response that can be studied

through text.77 The use of the term ‘response’ here recognizes images in their role as objects and that as such they are not only viewed, but also touched and experienced

through the body, including in violent acts of destruction.78 Reactions other than passive viewing – especially those that are seemingly disruptive – are often considered to be problematic, or simply as ‘mad’ or examples of ‘fanaticism’. Yet these other modes

of response are still present in contemporary society and have a deep history, as several recent eth nographic and archaeological studies have shown.79 These studies complicate the way response is interpreted and the terminology used to describe acts of destruction.

The terms ‘destruction’, ‘mutilation’, and ‘transformation’ that will appear throughout this book may seem relatively straightforward but all will benefit from some definition and unpacking,80 along with a number of other terms that will be commonly applied

throughout this study. This unpacking of terminologies is important and builds on

recent developments in both archaeological and anthropological thinking. In spite of

its leanings towards a historically situated approach, it is my hope that this study will add something further to these ongoing discussions.

For a number of reasons, I have predominantly restrained from using the term

76 On viewing, see (among the ever increasing corpus) Osborne 1987; Elsner 1995; 2007; Zanker 1997; Platt 2002; Clarke 2003.

77 Elsner 1995: 10-11.

78 On this issue, see now Pattison 2007. A recent study by Laura Nasrallah (2010, reviewed by Kristensen 2011a) also uses the term “Christian response to Roman art and architecture” but deals mainly with the second century.

79 Archaeological and eth nographic contexts: Ouzman 2001; Cummings 2002; Wells 2008. Modern contexts: Finn 1997; Holtorf 2005. Simpson makes a similar point, arguing in contrast to common opinion that “iconoclasm is a recurrent feature of Anglo-American, as of other Western modernities” (2010: 4).

80 See also Gamboni 1997: 17-20 for discussion of the terminologies used in the study of the destruction of art.

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‘iconoclasm’ to describe episodes of violence against images. Where I do use it, I use the generic definition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines an iconoclast as

“a person who destroyed images used in religious worship.”81 Due to its connection

with the Byzantine Empire in the eighth and ninth centuries, and later again with the

European Reformation, the term is loaded with many assumptions about the destruc-

tion of images that may not apply to the period under study.82 The use of the term

often, for example, particularly emphasizes the importance of scripture and theological doctrine in understanding acts of destruction.

Responses resulting in irreversible loss of material integrity:

Obliteration without residue

Destruction with residue

Disfiguring: partial destruction, damage, mutilation, fragmentation

More reversible responses, maintaining material integrity:

Humiliation: forms of abuse, insult, demotion

Theft

Hiding: burial, disguise, imprisonment

Negative cultural redefinition

Table 0.1. Schematic overview of the relationship between destructive responses and the loss of material integrity, to be read as a sliding scale.
83

I here prefer the terms ‘Christian response’ and ‘destruction’. ‘Destruction’ here generally refers to the deliberate overthrow and breakage of an image. However, destruction is best seen as a spectrum that has a variety of different impacts on the material integrity of an object (Table 0.1). This impact is frequently seriously mispresented in the textual sources that always have axes to grind. The first category within this spectrum, oblitera-tion without residue (‘real’ destruction, as it were), naturally would leave us with no 81 I do not imply a correlation between the iconoclasm of the period in question here (fourth through seventh centuries) and the later, more famous Byzantine iconoclasms (eighth and ninth centuries). My definition of iconoclasm thus also differs from Peter Stewart’s use of the term (see Stewart 2003: 267), since he includes secular violence against images such as *damnatio memoriae* and other forms of politically motivated violence. Nonetheless, religion and politics

were closely entwined in Antiquity and are not as easily separable as presented here. On iconoclasm in all its incarnations as *damnatio memoriae*, and early Christian, Byzantine, and Islamic violence against images, see Gero 1999.

82 On Byzantine iconoclasm, see Barber 2002 and (most recently) Brubaker 2012. See Bremmer 2008a for a genealogy of the terms ‘iconoclasm’, ‘iconoclast’, and ‘iconoclastic’. On iconoclasm during the Reformation, see, for example, Freedberg 1977; Wandel 1995; Koerner 2004.

83 Slightly modified from Rambelli & Reinders 2007: 21, table 1.1.

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material to work from, but is occasionally attested to in texts, although that evidence is in turn often contradicted by archaeological findings. The second, destruction with residue, will form one of the core groups of evidence in this book, but also opens the arena for a degree of ambiguity or ambivalence in terms of Christian response. Leaving residue may be explained pragmatically (for example, by stating that destroying the

relief decoration of Egyptian temples was simply too massive a task or that there was

no need to completely destroy a stone image), but it can also hold symbolic meaning,

as will be explored further in Chapters 1 and 2.

Mutilation, the act of deliberately damaging an object or taking it apart, represents

a third category in this spectrum of destruction and can similarly have a variety of

meanings in different contexts. The work of Joh n Chapman has been very important in

the interpretation of fragmented objects in the archaeological record, offering insights into the different meanings that this response may hold. In his book *Fragmentation in Archaeology* (2000), he explores the multitudes of roles that fragments, understood as parts of a whole, can play in gift exchanges, social rituals, and the formation of

personal relationships.84 The fragment can, for example, function as a metaphor for

social practices, connecting places, individuals, and group identities through the

practice of enchainment. The topic of fragmentation has also been explored from

an art historical angle by Linda Nochlin, Leonard Barkan, and, most recently, in a

collection of papers from a Getty seminar imaginatively entitled *The Fragment: An*

Incomplete History.85 More frequently, however, mutilation is an act that is fuelled by anger, hatred, or disapproval.

Finally, as a range of previous studies has shown, destruction does not have exclu-

sively negative connotations; it can be opposed to the term vandalism, which has a

more directly derogatory sense.86 The deliberate breakage of objects was a relatively

common practice in relation to the sacred status of images in ancient and prehistoric

societies.87 There are some similar examples of this in the Roman and late antique

periods. While the portraits of Geta were defaced from the Severan arch at Leptis

Magna as part of his *damnatio memoriae* in 211, one of the heads was carefully deposited beneath the monument, indicating the status that it was still perceived to have.88 In the 84 Chapman 2000; and see now also Chapman & Gaydarska 2007. For the application of his framework in Roman archaeology, see Croxford 2003.

85 Nochlin 1995; Barkan 1999: 119-207; Tronzo 2009 (explicitly acknowledging its debt to Nochlin, p. 1). In this collection, Liverani considers the function of fragments in Late Antiquity (Liverani 2009).

86 The modern use of the term ‘vandalism’ originates in eighteenth-century France. The term is occasionally used in modern French literature, notably Réau 1994, which is an account of the destruction of art and architecture from antiquity to the present (encompassing both Christian iconoclasm and modern architectural eyesores). See ibid.: 9-13 on the origins of the term ‘van-dalisme’.

87 On the deliberate damage of votives at Olympia, see Frielinghaus 2006. See also Aldhouse-Green 2004: 18-20 on the ritual destruction of images in the northwestern provinces.

88 Donderer 1991-1992: 250-251, cat. no. 40; Varner 2004: 179.

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1990s, sondages under the mosaic floor of an early Christian basilica in Carthage furthermore revealed fragments of a statue of Venus, presumably destroyed and deposited

there by members of the congregation.89 This has usually been interpreted as a case of Christian intolerance and violence towards the pagan past, yet it may have had a very

different meaning: these images may have been seen as important relics of the past or

even as a means of building up visual power for the church, just as Egyptian temples

had stored cult images in inaccessible spaces. According to sixth- and seventh-century sources, this was the rationale behind Constantine's burial of the Palladion from Rome at the foot of an honorific column in his new capital; at Mamre, a similar collection

of smashed up statuary was reused in the foundations of the Constantinian church.90

That these statues from Tunisia and Palestine were broken need not rob them of their

significance, as is clear from the case of a broken figurine of Hercules found on the

Campus Martius, each piece of which had been wrapped in linen before deposition,

providing evidence for the deliberate care of mutilated images.91 In another case from Bornheim-Sechtem, it has furthermore been suggested that the sculptural fragments

found in a Mithraeum functioned as relics for the worshippers.92

Fragmentation may thus not equal the end of the use-life of an image, and the burial

of statuary may have a variety of meanings. Disfiguration is another kind of response

that can have very particular meanings in different cultural and religious contexts, as we will see. Other forms of destruction may result in no or only reversible physical damage. Verbal forms of abuse, similar to that we see in many examples of early Christian rhetoric, could also be part of a response to pagan images. Hiding, burial, and theft are all responses that are attested to in the late antique sources, but there are many possible explanations for such acts. Stealing or hiding a cult image may have been a relatively simple and effective way of putting an end to pagan worship, but is a response that can be difficult to interpret. Were those hiding such images angry Christians who objected to them, or alternatively tradition-bound pagans who respectfully buried their images

while hoping for better times to return?93

At the centre of both destruction and mutilation is a transformative process that re-

iterates the meaning, value, and social significance of an object. Very often, destruction was not an end in itself, for example, in the case of Demeas' triumphalistic inscription at Ephesus where the base may have been adapted from a previous use and then placed in

89 The basilica in question is the so-called Dermech I basilica, see Alexander, Ben Abed-Ben Khader,

& Métraux 1996: 367. Figs. 17g-h show the findspot of the sculptural cache, right by the entrance to the church.

90 Constantine and the Palladion: Malalas, *Chronicle*, 320. If we consider this example in the light of Traunecker's classification of Egyptian cult images, the statues underneath the Tunisian church could also be interpreted as belonging to "culte latent" (see Chapter 2, "Approaching Egypt").

On Mamre, see Chapter 3, “Christianization and Memory in the Late Antique Near East.”

91 Caseau 2001: 112-113; Frankfurter 2008a: 668.

92 See Wulfmeier 2004.

93 On the burial of statuary, see Donderer 1991-1992; Alexandrescu-Vianu 2009, and forthcoming work by Silviu Anghel.

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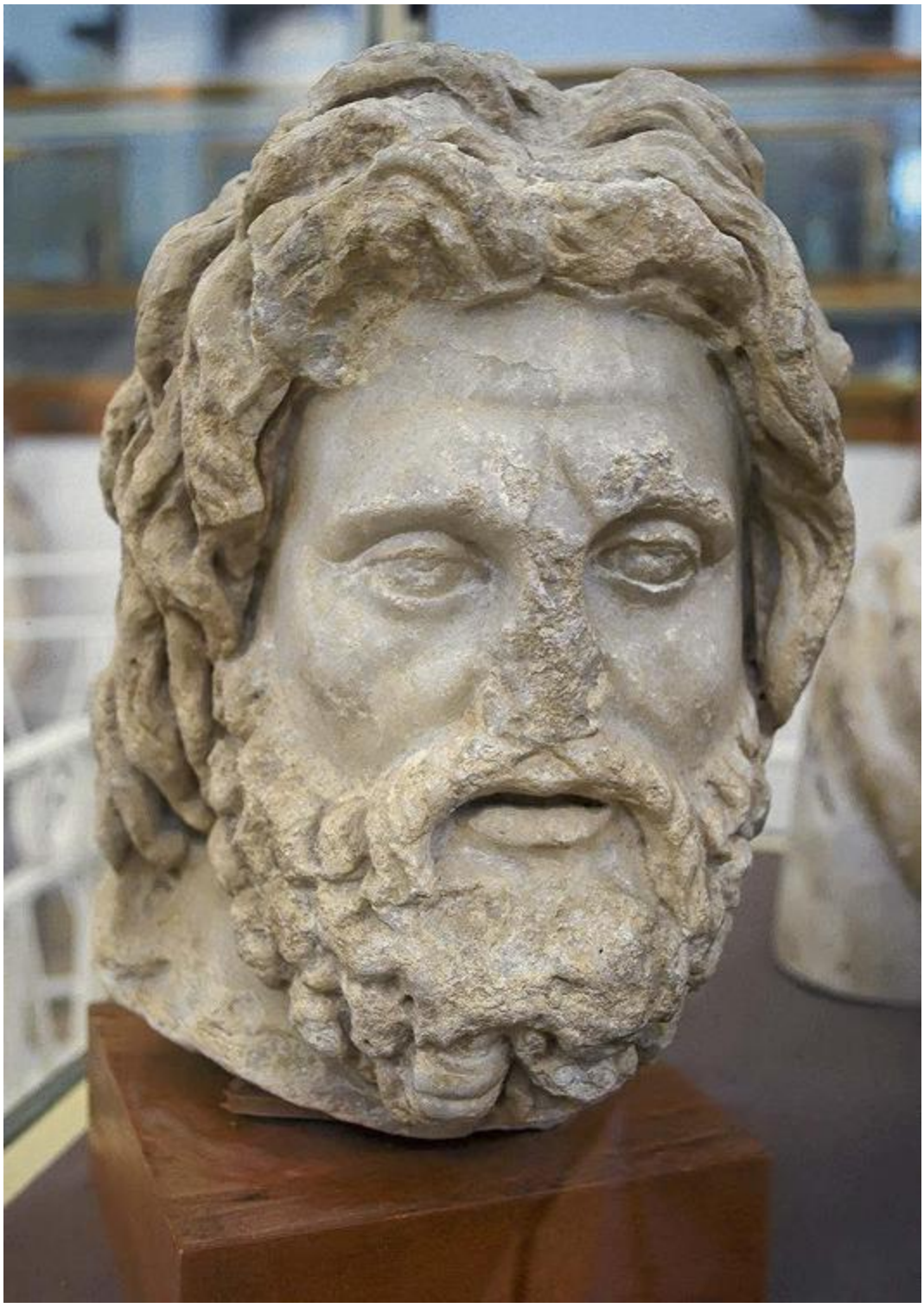

Head of Zeus or Asclepius from Gerasa, now

Fig. 0.6.

in the Amman Archaeological Museum (photo:

author).

a prominent urban setting. In late antique studies, transformation is frequently a term that has been applied in the study of spoliation, the reuse of architecture or sculpture in later monuments.94 The reuse and rework of statuary had a long history in Rome,

but the issue became especially acute in Late Antiquity. Much recent work has been

devoted to the positive and creative aspects of this reuse, in contrast to the more derogatory view taken in the past. Another part of the transformative process is the ability of viewers to re-interpret a monument. This argument has occasionally been put forward

in relation to the treatment of the Parthenon metopes in Late Antiquity. While some

were seemingly mutilated, others were spared, perhaps because of their similarity with Christian figures, such as the Virgin Mary and Eve.95 Another relatively well-known case is a head of Zeus (or Asclepius) from Gerasa which is now in Amman (Fig. 0.6).96 It was found in a fifth-century context in the Church of St. Theodore, mixed with architectural 94 See Blanck 1969; Kinney 1997; Ward-Perkins 1999; Coates-Stephens 2007. On reuse of marble, see also Greenhalgh 2009. The quarrying of stone for reuse is occasionally mentioned in relationship to episodes of destruction. It is, for example, attested that Mar Rabbula reused the stones of four “temples of idols” to construct a hospital for women (*The Heroic Deeds of Mar Rabbula*, ed. Doran, 101).

95 E.g. North Metope 32 (see Jeppesen 1963: 60; Brommer 1967: 60; Taf. 132). On Christian responses to the Parthenon metopes, see Pollini 2007.

96 Amman, Jordan Archaeological Museum inv. J 2212. See also Cook 1940: 1196-1197, n. iii. 973, pl. LXXXIII; Weber 2002: 487, cat. no. C 5; Taf. 123b.

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fragments, and it has been suggested that this sculpture was re-interpreted as Christ and somehow displayed in the church as such. If this suggestion is accepted, it would

again highlight how re-interpretation of a pagan image could take place in a Christian context, and how an image's status as sacred could even be reconfirmed. Several other, later examples at Barletta and Rome could also be cited in this context.97 During the

Renaissance, occasionally very imaginative stories and names were given to the ancient fragments still standing in Rome, as is discussed extensively by Barkan. This kind of

re-interpretation is important to late antique configurations of the cityscape, as I shall argue in more detail in Chapter 3.

Some further definitions are in order. The term 'pagan sculpture' as used throughout

this book is not entirely unproblematic. Statues of pagan divinities and mythological

figures are at present more frequently referred to as mythological or allegorical, or by the German term *Idealplastik*, thus downplaying the religious significance that they could have had to some viewers.98 This approach has paved the way for several fruitful studies of the social context of the display of such statuary in Late Antiquity, especially within the private sphere. 'Pagan' is furthermore a term that is difficult to apply without closer definition, suggesting, as it does, a great degree of alterity or polarization.99 Yet both are here used as short hand categories, empty

of other connotations: pagan as opposed to Christian, and pagan sculpture as encompassing all statuary (both reliefs and sculpture in the round) with mythological subject matter, as well as those images that may have been perceived as such (and this occasionally includes portraits as well). The use of the term furthermore has the advantage of emphasizing the religious aspects of

Roman statuary that so frequently have been downplayed or overlooked, an issue that

will be explored further in Chapter 1.

While bronze sculpture is occasionally discussed, stone sculpture, mostly in the round or relief, is my primary concern here. This requires some commentary, as the concepts

of 'living stones' and 'living images' were not limited to marble sculptures or any other representations in stone or metal.100 Bronze sculpture, however, poses some occasionally quite different interpretive problems, as even the tiniest fragment of bronze had scrap value, both in late antique and later times.101 Nonetheless, there are examples of bronze sculpture that have been interpreted as victims of Christian violence, including 97 Barletta: Stewart 1999: 170-171; Lahusen & Formigli 2001: 325-331, cat. no. 202. At Rome, the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, now on the Campidoglio, represents a similar case of reinterpretation.

98 Note the important discussion of terminology in Stirling 2005: 22-28. See also Chapter 1, "Making the Gods: Roman Religion and Visual Practices."

99 For an overview of the use of the term 'paganism', refer to Kazhdan & Talbot 1991.

100 On living stones, see Plumpe 1943. However, there are examples of bronze sculpture that have been interpreted from the perspective of Christian response, such as fragments of bronze statues that were found in the Tiber and the Thames, see Merrifield 1987: 99-103.

101 Croxford forthcoming.

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a Severan princess from Sparta.102 Fragments of bronze statues in the Tiber and the Thames have also been considered from the perspective of Christian response.103

While the corpus of stone sculpture is large and generally well-suited for the purposes of the present study, there are considerable regional differences not only in survival, but also in the production and use of sculpture across the provinces of the eastern

Mediterranean. For example, in the otherwise affluent Near East, very little marble

sculpture has been found outside a few major centres. Limestone and basalt was more

common here, and the availability of marble was always an issue in many parts of the

empire.104 In Egypt, the types of statuary that was produced in the Roman period dif-

fered in many ways from that seen elsewhere, which occasionally makes cross-regional

comparison difficult. Different media and materials furthermore show different rates

of survival and different characteristics of fragmentation. For example, it is easier to recognize mutilation of relief sculpture, given that it is more

difficult to move around and thus less vulnerable to some of the forms of fragmentation that are characteristic of smaller, lighter pieces.105

Media other than sculpture were also targeted by late antique Christian responses. An

episode from Amaseia in northern Turkey in the 560s or 570s tells of a Christian who

accidentally unearthed a mosaic with a depiction of Aphrodite which seemingly had

demonic powers.106 To counter these powers, the patriarch Eutychios had to perform

the required rites of exorcism. Another hagiography informs us of a group of villagers who reused a marble sarcophagus as a water fountain and called on St. Theodore of

Sykeon to exorcise the demon that dwelled within it.107 There are also literary sources that describe the destruction of natural and rural places of worship, such as when St.

Nicholas chopped down sacred trees in Lycia.108 Sacred trees and groves were furthermore the focus of religious controversy during the Constantininian period in Mamre and

Bethlehem.109 At Dodona, where a sacred oak played an important role in the oracular

cult, the excavators have claimed that a large hole dug in the courtyard of the *hiera* 102 On the so-called ‘Fulvia Plautilla’, now in the Athens National Museum, whose face has been severely battered, see Riccardi 1998 (favouring Christian destruction); Lahusen & Formigli 2001: 259-261, cat. no. 161 (citing *damnatio memoriae*); further critical comments of this interpretation in Stewart 2008a: 128, n. 58.

103 Merrifield 1987: 99-103.

104 For an overview of this issue in Late Antiquity, see Bowersock, Brown, & Grabar 1999: 559-562

(M. Waelkens).

105 Rothaus 2000: 114. The different means of fragmentation, destruction, and mutilation will subsequently be given more careful consideration in the regional contexts of Chapters 2 and 3.

106 Eustratius, *Vita Euthychii* 51; and see Mango 1994: 98-99; Trombley 2008: 160-161.

107 Saradi-Mendelovici 1990: 59; see *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, ed. Festugière, 98, § 118.

108 *The Life of Saint Nicholas of Sion* 15-16, 18.

109 On Mamre and Bethlehem, see Trombley 1995: I, 156-158; Caseau 2004: 123-124. In *The Life and Times of St. Benedict*, 136, ed. Lech ner, the local pagans converted by Benedict simultaneously destroy both idols and sacred groves. Euseb., *Vit. Const.* , 3.55 describes how Constantine demolished a rural sanctuary of Aphrodite at Aphaca in the mountains of Lebanon. In his study of Driving Demons Away

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oikia marks the spot where it was removed in Late Antiquity.110 Excavation of a rural sanctuary of Minerva in Valcamonica in Lombardy revealed a headless marble statue

of Minerva that is likely to have been deliberately mutilated in the fourth century.111

The regional *foci* of the study are Egypt and the Near East, although the discussion of Roman visual practices extends to other parts of the Empire

and explicitly begins with examples from the city of Rome. A large number of the accounts of Christian violence

against pagan images that complement and nuance Demeas' response at Ephesus are

found in the eastern Mediterranean, and the evidence from Egypt and the Near East

provides glimpses into particularly local traditions of visual culture and how they came into conflict with Christianity. The evidence from these two regions is well-suited to shed light on changing Christian responses to pagan sculpture in both sacred and urban spaces. Work by other scholars on other regions of the eastern Mediterranean, especially Asia Minor and Greece, will provide additional regional coverage to the two locations

under study here.112

Before moving on to the more detailed regional case studies that make up Chapters

2 and 3, further consideration of the social and religious world of Demeas is necessary in order to situate Christian responses within the broader perspective of Roman and

late antique visual culture. Chapter 1 ("Making and Breaking the Gods: From Roman

Visual Practices to Christian Response") begins with the problem of divine representa-

tion: how Romans gave material and visual form to their gods. I argue that Christian

destruction represents a reversal of fate and it is therefore useful to think more broadly about Roman visual practices. It thus compares the complementary practices of making

and breaking the gods by taking a critical look at how archaeologists and art historians have studied Roman sculpture of a religious character. Chapter 1 also discusses in more detail the historical outline of the study and the chronological development of Christian responses to pagan images in Late Antiquity. Finally, it introduces the methodological framework of the study as well as the implications of writing an archaeological contribution to the history and theory of response.113

"religious hatred" in Late Antiquity, Sauer looks at a series of rural sanctuaries in the Northwestern provinces, including hilltop sanctuaries (2003: 70-78).

110 Mee & Spawforth 2001: 382.

111 Rossi 1992: 380.

112 Joh n Pollini investigates Christian desecration and destruction of images with special emphasis on late antique Greece in a forthcoming monograph (working title: *Christian Destruction and Desecration of Images of Classical Antiquity: A Study in Religious Intolerance in the Ancient World*).

Rachel Kousser is similarly working on a book-length study with a particular focus on Classical and Hellenistic Greece, entitled *Ancient Iconoclasm: Destroying the Power of Images in Greece, 480-31*

B.C. Guy Métraux has also been working on a book-length project based on his discovery of a mutilated statue of Venus in Tunisia, see Alexander, Ben Abed-Ben Khader & Métraux 1996: 367. Ine Jacobs considers sculpture in the urban spaces of late antique Asia Minor in *Aesthetic Maintenance of Civic Space: The 'Classical' City from the 4th to the 7th Century AD* (Leuven, 2013).

113 "History of response" is part of the subtitle of Freedberg 1989. Response also featured prominently in the subtitle of Stewart's book *Statues in Roman Society* (2003). The title of his chapter on the **36**

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Chapter 2 (“The Semantics of Christian Response: Pagan Sculpture in the Sacred Spaces of Egypt”) is an in-depth study of Christian responses in Egypt, focusing on

their particular meanings within that local context. The emphasis here is particularly on sacred spaces. Alexandria was home to the famous Serapeum whose cult statue was

violently destroyed in 392, according to the textual sources, and the city offers a useful case study for comparing historical and archaeological sources. Egypt is furthermore a region with a well-studied tradition of visual culture that developed over several millennia. This regional tradition, I argue, is crucial in understanding the shape that Christian responses took in Late Antiquity. Egypt is just as importantly a region where we have an unusually rich combination of archaeological and textual sources, although both groups of material present interpretive difficulties. The Christian destruction of pagan sculpture in Late Antiquity has in scholarship frequently been regarded as a mindless aspect of

religious intolerance. However, a closer study of the phenomenon, as observed through

the extant textual and archaeological sources from Egypt, suggests a more complex

modus operandi in Christian responses to pagan images that is furthermore revelatory of contemporary conceptions of religious imagery. Christian responses to pagan sculpture

are in this way of importance to our understanding of the transformation of sacred

space in Late Antiquity.

Chapter 3 (“Re-Imagining Idols: Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in the Urban

Spaces of the Near East”) shifts the focus towards the Near East and considers a wide

spectrum of Christian responses to pagan images that can be illuminated at Scythopolis, Palmyra, and Caesarea Maritima in particular. The emphasis in this chapter will be on

urban spaces and how Christian responses to pagan images were part of a complex and

creative dialogue between past and present. This dialogue allowed pagan sculpture to be re-interpreted and given new roles within the urban landscape. The material from the

Near East also allows for a closer study of the chronological development of Christian responses and the social contexts in which they came to the fore.

While many of the textual and archaeological sources that are discussed in the fol-

lowing may be familiar to some readers, what is offered here is an attempt to present a theoretically informed synthesis that emphasizes regional overview and methodological

rigour in its treatment of the individual cases. Many of the previous studies that have tackled these examples have been set apart from any broader contextual analysis of the visual practices in Roman society and religion, and the following pages should hopefully go some way towards rectifying this.

destruction and mutilation of images is called “Touching Statues” – thus directly evoking the haptic sense in the experience of statuary. On the history of responses to images, see also Warnke 1973; Bredekamp 1975; Freedberg 1989; Gamboni 1997; McClanan & Joh nson 2005.

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CHAPTER 1

Making and Breaking the Gods:

From Roman Visual Practices

to Christian Response

“Defacement is like Enlightenment.

It brings insides outside, unearthing knowledge, and revealing mystery”

Michael Taussig, *Defacement* (1999: 3)

“[I]mages are nowhere as vociferous as when handled by an iconoclast”

Joseph Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (2004: 106)

In 1945, Frederik Poulsen, having then just recently retired as director of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, exposed a case of what he explicitly denounced as religious

fraud.1 Conservation of a first-century portrait of the Greek philosopher Epicurus that had been in the Glyptotek’s collections since 1890 had revealed a number of unusual

features (Fig. 1.1). The conservators discovered that the portrait bust had been hollowed out in Antiquity, creating a perforated space that extended from its underside to an

opening in the area of the mouth.2 Poulsen suggested that this speaking tube had been

installed in order to allow priests to make the image ‘speak’ and communicate with

worshippers through words or sounds.3 He then presented a survey of other cases of

talking, weeping, and bleeding statues from such diverse places and cultures as Sumerian Mari, Greek Dodona, Egyptian Karanis, and Byzantine Constantinople (amongst others). While this discovery is fascinating in its own right, Poulsen’s article is interesting for what it reveals about a clash between, on the one hand, modern expectations of

Greco-Roman religious practice, and on the other, ancient realities, as attested to by this particular piece of material evidence. Philosopher portraits are not traditionally classified as divine images, but this example had nonetheless been given the features of 1

Poulsen 1945, discussing Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, inv. 416, most recently republished in Johansen 1992: 96-97, cat. no. 38, and with new inv. 607. Johansen notes Poulsen’s identification of the portrait as an oracular image, but without reproducing relevant photographs. The portrait was purchased in 1890 from the antiquities dealer Francesco Martinetti.

2 Poulsen comments on the modification of the bust: “The work is evidently ancient; this is shown by tech nique and weathering” (1945: 181), and see his further remarks on p. 182.

3 Poulsen 1945: 182.

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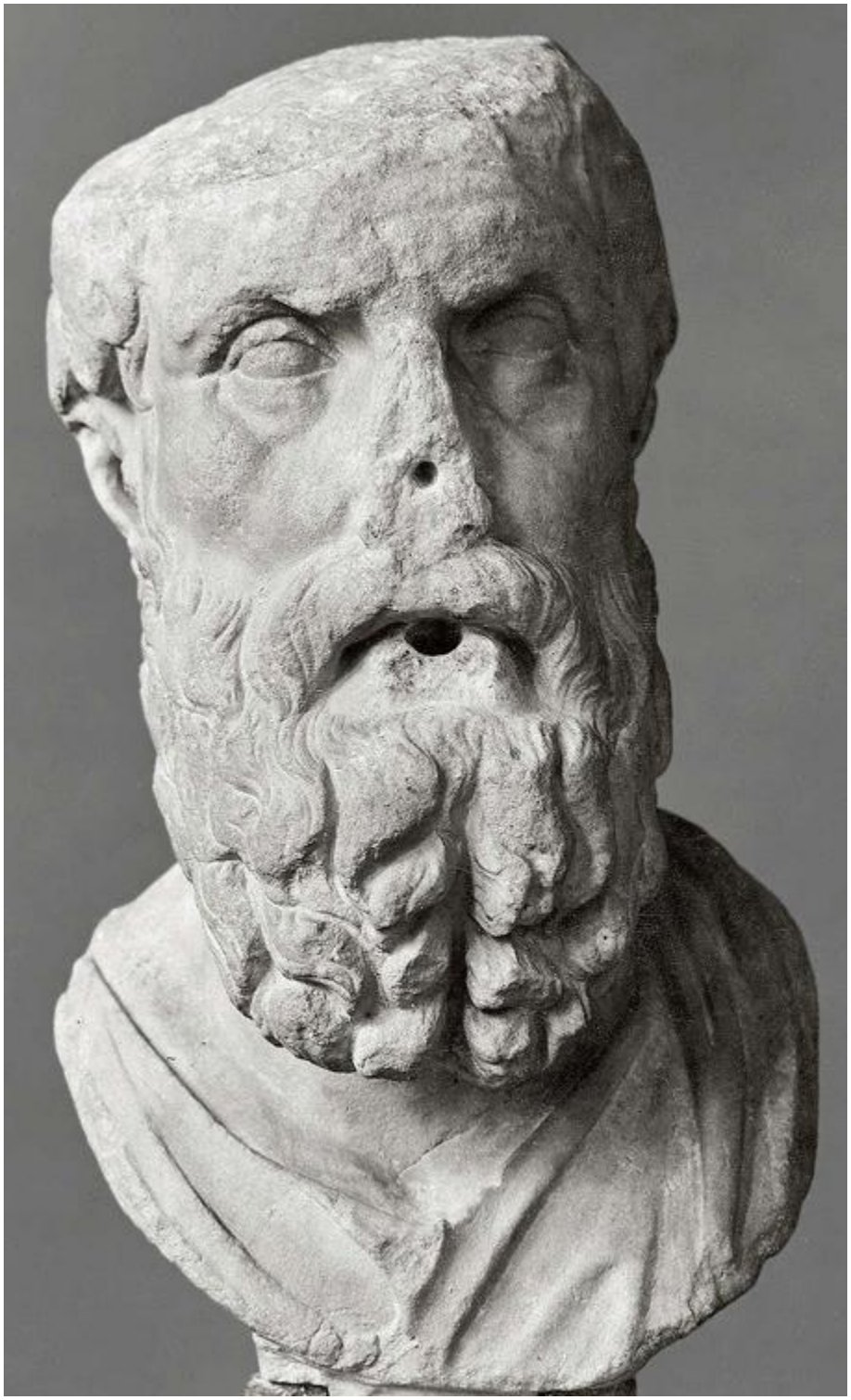

Fig. 1.1. *Portrait of Epicurus after removal of restora-*

tions, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen,

IN 607 (photo courtesy of the museum).

an oracular image with the ability to engage audibly with worshippers. Yet this ‘naïve’

and ‘irrational’ form of divine presence clearly did not satisfy Poulsen’s expectations of ancient religion.4

Roman statues were until relatively recent times studied predominantly as *objets*

d’art, which effectively dislocated them from the religious, social, and political contexts to which they were originally intimately connected.5 Although the role of statues in

power politics and as a means of displaying social prestige has now been illuminated

by a wide range of important archaeological and art historical studies, the religious

dimension of divine images frequently remains ignored or only discussed using crude

4 Poulsen’s view is, of course, reflective of his time. Johannes Geffcken had earlier noted the tendency to conflate the categories of “image” and “prototype” in ancient religion, which he ascribed to the “simplistic habits and superstitions *des Volkes*” (1916-1919: 287; cited from Ando 2008: 23).

The classic exploration of the clash between modern expectations and Greek “irrationalism” is Dodds 1951.

5

See also Stewart 2003: 9-10. The neglect of the religious aspects of Classical statuary in the relevant literature has previously been pointed out by Elsner 2007: 29-48 (first published 1996). For a similar discussion of

the lack of discussions of religion in the study of Greek statuary, see Spivey 1996: 84.

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(modern) categories that do not do justice to the role they had in Antiquity.6 A central premise of this book is that Demeas' world, which for our purposes encompasses the

gamut of late antique Christian responses to pagan sculpture, offers an opportunity to engage more broadly with Roman visual practices – that is, to enter a wider discussion of how images were used and perceived in religion and society at large. These responses, as observable through both textual and archaeological sources, present a chance to explore the uncanny qualities of cult images (such as the Glyptotek's oracular philosopher portrait) as they were perceived by pagans and Christians alike, even if these two groups employed very different terminologies for cult statues and their usage.7

The approach outlined here regards the rites of destruction that characterize many

cases of Christian responses as constituting reversals of religious and social order, even in their attempts to mock these very same. This mirrors what one of the pioneers of memory studies, Paul Connerton, has observed in relation to the French Revolution, namely

that a rite "revoking an institution only makes sense by invertedly recalling the other rites that hitherto confirmed that institution."8 Similarly, Christian performances of iconoclasm in Late Antiquity were frequently conceived to revoke any notion of agency

within images, that is, that images were anything other than lifeless matter. The power of cult images was in this way negated through acts that revoked the very rituals designed to empower them. I furthermore argue that the ways in which Christians responded to

and physically mutilated pagan sculpture are indicative of particular conceptions of visual practices as they were experienced in Late Antiquity. Having acknowledged this, it is

possible to move beyond the usual picture of iconoclastic actions as wanton destruction that does not require further explanation and to propose more sophisticated analyses of the phenomenon. It also becomes possible to answer that important question originally

posed by Freedberg in his study of *The Power of Images* and paraphrased here: what did Demeas and his peers think they achieved when they physically attacked an image?9

In short, why was it necessary for some Christian groups in Late Antiquity to destroy

and mutilate pagan sculpture? What can we say about their motivations?

Freedberg's question will be the main impetus of the following chapters, but to provide an adequate framework through which to interpret Christian responses, this chapter

begins with a discussion of how cult statues were visually and materially constituted

6 Much of the work on the political and social contexts of Roman statuary is reviewed in Stewart 2008a. Greek statuary has received more sophisticated studies in recent years (although with a heavy slant towards the textual sources), notably Frontisi-Ducroux 2001 [1975]; Faraone 1992; Sch napp 1992; Steiner 2001. Frequently the focus has been on the terminology that was used to describe statuary (notably in Donohue 1988; Stewart 2003: 19-46). However, this can only be half the story. Estienne et al. 2008 and Mylonopoulos 2010a are two recent contributions that seek to

confront the issue of divine representation in both Greek and Roman visual culture.

7 On the uncanny qualities of images, see, for example, Freedberg 1989: 283-316; Gross 1992; Mitchell 2005; Maniura & Shepherd 2006.

8 Connerton 1989: 9. See also Stewart 2003: 276-277.

9 The question as originally framed by Freedberg was “what do people think they achieve when they punish an image?” (1989: 415).

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in the Roman world. The theological nature of divine images in Roman religion has repeatedly been left unaddressed by scholarship beyond mere description and typology,

albeit with a number of notable exceptions. For the most part, Roman cult imagery has

thus been disenchanted. This is surprising, given the recent appearance of relevant studies from outside the Greco-Roman world that have illuminated the contexts in which

cult images were made, consecrated, and used.10 Even in many overviews of Roman

religion, cult images are only considered in passing as part of standardized descriptions of temples or sanctuaries that usually make little use of the material evidence, and rarely consider the significance of cult images beyond their role in the most formal kind of

state rituals.11 Many modern scholars regard it as an awkward topic, an opinion that

also becomes apparent in the translation of ancient sources.12 On the other hand,

archaeological reports that present the finds from the excavation of sanctuaries have

generally failed to consider the theological underpinnings and epiphanic potential of

the cult images that they have uncovered. The following discussion of Roman visual

practices is nonetheless essential in understanding later responses, not least because Christian critiques of statuary should be understood in the context of older philosophical debates on superstition and the fear of representations, such as, for example, those found in Plutarch's *Moralia*.13

Part of the reason for this disparity in acknowledging the religious role of Roman

statuary can be ascribed to disciplinary boundaries that have left the place of material culture and indeed images in religious practices understudied. Disparate terminologies have also been a problem; Thomas Mathews, for example, has commented on how the

label of 'late antique art' has obscured the religious meaning of much early Christian art.14 Even if this volume cannot fully bridge this gap, it may provide a small contribution to increasing emphasis on visual and material evidence within discussions of divine images in the Roman world. After the initial discussion of Roman visual practices,

I move on to a brief survey of the Christian appropriation of and response to these

practices in late antique contexts, as they can be glimpsed through the textual sources.

This leads me to address Freedberg's question directly, as I consider some of the most important motives of late antique iconoclasts. This in turn confronts us with the issue of the historical value of hagiographies and other problematic genres of Christian literature that, in spite of their biases and distortions, nonetheless represent an important 10 As discussed in Chapter 2, Egyptology has seen several very fruitful studies of divine representation, aided by a rich repertoire of textual sources but also taking into account the materiality of cult images. On parallel cases from Babylonia and Assyria, see Winter 1992; 2007; Bahrani 2003.

On India, see Waghorne, Cutler, & Narayanan 1985; Davis 1997.

11 An exception is Rüpke 2007, which highlights the ambivalent status of cult images as both manmade and divine as well as their importance in epiphanies (pp. 69-74). Ando 2008: 21-42 and Rüpke 2010 both confront the issue directly.

12 Gordon 1979: 7.

13 See now the important discussion of Ando 2008: 21-42, esp. 27-31 on the origins of Christian apologetics in Plato, and Nasrallah 2010: 171-295.

14 Mathews 1999: 11-12.

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body of evidence for this study. Given their highly rhetorical nature and dependence on conventional topoi that may belie their relationship to the world outside of the text, how are they best approached? Finally, in the

chapter's last section, one of the book's main methodological frameworks is introduced and some of the interpretive issues that

face a context-driven archaeology of response are explored.

Making the Gods: Roman Religion and Visual Practices

Scholarship on ancient cult images has progressed in significant ways since Poulsen's

work, but Roman visual practices remain difficult to summarize and their study contin-

ues to pose some intriguing questions about the nature of Roman religion.15 The visual practices of the Roman world were certainly both regionally and temporally diverse as

well as ambiguously perceived among different social groups, all facts that have not been sufficiently emphasized in scholarship.16 I want here to briefly review evidence from

one important recent contribution to this field, the encyclopaedic *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum (ThesCRA)* and its entry on Roman cult images (published in 2004).

This will allow me to explore some specific aspects of Roman visual practices and the problems of incorporating these into modern narratives of religious practices. My aim

here is to raise questions rather than provide straightforward answers to problems that too often have been glossed over.

Following the encyclopaedic tradition of *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Clas-*

sicae (*LIMC*), *ThesCRA* compiles the extensive evidence for the many different kinds of ritual behaviour that cult images in the Greco-Roman world were treated to, including

clothing, washing, feeding, and various other forms of caretaking that confirmed their sacred status on a regular basis.17 As such, it provides us with a string of fascinating snapshots into cultic practices at specific places and points in time. What it does not do is provide a narrative that correlates these sources with the even more extensive

evidence for the rationalization of artistic practice that was the foundation of the highly lauded "invention of art history" in Greco-Roman scholarship.18 These two traditions

seemingly existed side by side in the Roman world, and it was in the philosophical

and theological exploration of the nature of divine images that Christian responses

developed.

15 On Roman cult statues, see Martin 1987; Vermeule 1987; Stewart 2008a: 130-142. For a Gell-inspired perspective on Roman cult statues, see Stewart 2007a.

16 On regional differences, compare Chapter 2, "Approaching Egypt," and Chapter 3, "Approaching the Near East."

17 *ThesCRA* II (2004): 417-507 (Linant de Bellefonds et al.).

18 For a recent attempt to understand the relationship between these two developments in the context of cult statues, see Platt 2011. On the "invention of art history," refer to Tanner 2006.

See also Squire 2009: 113-116 and Estienne 2010 on the problem of defining the role of Roman cult statues in religious practices.

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Fig. 1.2. *Relief from Amiternum, showing a cult image on a* fercula *as part of the* pompa circensis *, now in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Chieti (photo courtesy of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, D-DAI-ROM-37.884, Faraglia).*

Figure 1.2 reproduces fragments of a relief that originally adorned a funerary monu-

ment at Amiternum, dating to the reign of Claudius. The fragment to the left shows

the procession of *pompa circensis*, in which cult images were carried through the city in advance of spectacles in the arena.19 This is a relatively uncontroversial example of how divine images were entangled in social, political, and religious life, and how the presence of the gods could be successfully mediated through their representations at important

points in the civic and religious calendar.20 From a Pompeian shop front comes a similar wall-painting depicting a procession in celebration of Magna Mater, showing her cult

image being carried on a litter and accompanied by musicians and priests; although this has been seen as an example of the excesses of this 'oriental' cult in Italy, it is essentially no different from the relief from Amiternum.21 Its location immediately facing one of

the main thoroughfares of Pompei, the Via dell'Abbondanza (where such *pompa sacra*

19 On this relief, see *ThesCRA* II (2004): 486, no. 625.

20 This is similar to the function of imperial images, cf. Stewart 2006: 252.

21 "Taberna delle Quattro Divinità" (IX 7,1, F 63): Spinazzola 1953: 213-237; Fröhlich 1991: 182-183; Beard, North, & Price 1998: II, 132-133; and see *ThesCRA* II (2004): 482, no. 592.

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could have taken place), is also noteworthy.22 A further case of the entanglement of statues in the cityscape is the epigraphically attested procession of Salutaris at Ephesus, which involved no fewer than 31 statues of gods, emperors, and personifications that

were to be carried through the city at regular intervals, as stipulated by the sponsor in a monumental inscription.23

However, our detailed knowledge of the logistical aspects and colourful depictions

of such processions does not reveal the full significance of this particular visual practice, and questions remain about the nature of participation in such processions. How

did the different participants conceptualize the images that they carried? What sort of rules dictated the ways in which onlookers could engage with the images? These questions relate to the verbal and physical negotiations of the borders between the real and the imaginary, to use the phrases of Richard Gordon's important review of scholarly

approaches to divine images from 1979.24 Salutaris' procession both began and ended

at the Temple of Artemis, thus demarcating a sacred continuum of space and ritual,

mediated through visual means. The successful appropriation of this visual practice

into Christianity, notably in the case of icons that were moved around the cityscape

of Constantinople, makes it even more pertinent to ask questions about the role that

divine images played in this experience of the sacred, both at the individual and societal levels.

Other evidence prompts further questions about the agency of images. It has been

noted, for instance, that on coins minted in Asia Minor during the Roman period, the

cult image of the Ephesian Artemis was depicted with two large chains tying her arms to the floor (Fig. 1.3). This has been interpreted as an indication of her ability to move, the chains thus preventing the cult statue from escaping her temple, although the authors

of the *ThesCRA* entry make this observation in less direct terms.25 Numismatic reports prefer to speak of the chains as supports and this may well be their secondary function, yet enchained statues are known also from Rome, such as an image of Saturn that was

released from its chains only during the Saturnalia festivities. It is not surprising that these cities chose to place this motif on their coins, which linked civic identity with the 22 On the lid of a sarcophagus today in S. Lorenzo fuori le Mura, we even see a procession of statues of both Magna Mater and Victoria, Vermaseren 1977: 96-97, no. 341.

23 Rogers 1991, esp. 80-126. Most of these statues were silver; some were overlaid with gold. In this case, the route that the procession took through the city can be reconstructed from the inscription that commemorated the Salutaris' endowment of the statues and their caretaking in the future.

On the Salutaris procession, see also Elsner 2007: 229-232.

24 Gordon 1979. In spite of Gordon's stimulating questions, Clifford Ando has recently noted how

"[f]ew scholars have taken up the challenge presented by Gordon's observation, namely that of explaining the seeming confusion of ontological categories implied by Pausanias's diction, in large measure because they, like Geffcken, unwittingly subscribe to a theory of representation incompatible with pagan religiosity" (2008: 23).

25 Frontisi-Ducroux 2001 [1975]; Freedberg 1989: 74-76. It is clear on many coins that these supports are indeed chains. *ThesCRA* notes: "de ses mains pendent des bandelettes qui resemblent à des chaînes" (II (2004): 471, no. 505).

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Fig. 1.3. *Bronze coin minted at Amorium between 144 and 161 depicting Apollo (with lyre) on obverse and enchained cult image of Ephesian Artemis on the reverse (* RPC *1707) (source: Roman Provincial Coinage Online).*

power and prestige of a famous cult image, but it is more difficult to understand the

chaining of the image and the underlying implication that the cult image was animated

and alive.26 Ephesus' cult image of Artemis was furthermore said to have fallen from the sky. What would be the appropriate response to this representation of such an animated cult image? We are evidently not dealing with a simple case of popular superstition, but an official iconography that had both civic and religious significance.

The last item to be mentioned here is comparable to the bust in Copenhagen discussed

by Poulsen. At Kôm el-Wist outside Alexandria, a bronze pedestal for a cult statue (of a bull) was found in the 1940s.27 The pedestal, dating to the late Ptolemaic or Roman

period, was hollow and connected through a tunnel to a small nearby chamber, where

a priest could give voice to the oracle. Poulsen undoubtedly would have allocated this evidence to his category of “religious fraud,” whereas others would prefer terms such

as superstition, magic, or theurgy.28 Yet the question here is whether these categories help us in understanding the ways in which images were actors in Roman religion.

26 Pausanias also relates the story of how the city of Orchomenos chained a statue to safeguard themselves against a ghost, see Paus. 9.38.4-5. *De Dea Syria*, 10, tells of the cries of statues that have been locked up in their temples.

27 Brunton 1942; Habachi 1942: 287; Frankfurter 2000b: 150.

28 On theurgy, see Dodds 1947 (reprinted with minor changes in Dodds 1951: App. II, 283-311). Note Stewart 2007a: 165, *a priori* locating the agency of images within theurgy: “Theurgy, the magical animation of statues, occupies a special space in Roman religious thought. It most certainly does not belong to the mainstream activities of cult.” Paradoxically, the majority of the evidence for this kind of behaviour originates from Christian sources. A lot of other evidence for these practices furthermore comes from Egypt, always considered to be a special case in most scholarship.

Stewart also points to the negative views held by Lucian concerning animated statues, but this **46**

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Theurgy, a Neoplatonist body of rituals that became increasingly popular in the second and third centuries, relies on the special powers of one person (the *theourgos*) to make contact with the divinity through which he experiences a bodily frenzy. Such a figure

is, for example, described in Damascius' *Philosophical History*.29 An Egyptian named Heraiscus is represented as being blessed with intuition (*eumoiria*) that enables him to distinguish between animate and inanimate divine images. Most, if not all evidence

for the animation of statues can be associated with theurgy and is overall very late in date, as recently emphasized by Sarah Iles Joh nston.30 But, as we saw in the case of

the Ephesian Artemis, animated statues (or at least those that held the potential of

movement) could also be part of mainstream religion. Magic is similarly a fluid cat-

egory whose boundaries with religion cannot (and should not) be narrowly defined.31

Attempting to place all evidence, such as that usefully collected by *ThesCRA* (whether iconographical, archaeological, or textual) for the agency of images, within the loose frameworks of theurgy, magic, or superstition thus does not help us in understanding

the role of divine images in Roman religion and society. Instead, an exploration should be made of the full spectrum of roles that divine images were perceived to have in

religious practices, as well as the diverse ways in which divine presence was manifested (and indeed manipulated) within sanctuaries.

The ontological status of Roman divine images was never stable or fixed. Poulsen's

views do certainly find its antecedents in Antiquity, and it is easy enough to locate historically attested responses that ridicule or downplay belief in the supernatural powers of divine images. In the second century B.C., Lucilius poked fun of those people who

worshipped *omnia ficta*, comparing their naivety to that of children.32 Even outside the world of literary texts, we find such evidence, as in the case of a papyrus dated to 198/199

and found at Oxyrhynchus, in which a high-standing official made clear his scepticism

of the use of images for the purpose of divination that was evidently common among

the populace.33

Others aimed for a middle ground. In his *Olympic Discourse*, delivered in front of no less a divine image than the Pheidian Zeus at Olympia, Dio Chrysostom argued that

cult statues were a means of creating cognitive "equal ground" in religious practices.34

evidence cannot be seen as representative of the responses of ordinary worshippers. On magic and statues, see Pekáry 2002: 139-153; Corso 2008.

29 Damascius,

Philosophical History, 76D-E, ed. Athanassiadi: "He had but to look at one of them and immediately his heart was afflicted by divine frenzy while both his body and soul leapt up as if possessed by a god. But if he was not moved in such a way, the statue was inanimate and devoid of divine inspiration" (76E, trans. Athanassiadi). See also Frankfurter 2008a: 664-665.

On the Hermetic 'fringe' in Roman religion, see Turcan 1996: 274-279.

30 Joh nston 2008.

31 See Bremmer 2008b: 347-352 for a recent review of this question.

32 Feeney 1998: 92-94, referring to Lucilius, frag. 484-489.

33 Parsons 2007: 176.

34 Dio Chrys., *Or.* 12.44-85. Dio also explicitly addresses the limits of divine representation (78).

This view resonates with Julian the Apostate's views (under the strong influence of Neoplatonism) Making and Breaking the Gods

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Chrysostom cleverly makes Pheidias defend his own work, underlining its importance as a theological statement on the nature of the sacred. Stoicism took a similar view and thought of divine images as allegories or symbols of the divine.35 In his discussion of divine images, the second-century rhetorician and philosopher Maximus of Tyre even

envisioned a disembodied divinity: "For God, Father and Creator of all that exists, is greater than the Sun and the heavens, mightier than time and eternity and the whole

flux of Nature; legislators cannot name him, tongues cannot speak of him, and eyes

cannot see him."36

In light of the evidence put forward here, it is untenable to argue that Roman views

of divine images are to be divided into two polar categories, one composed of the

vulgar superstition of the lower classes and the other belonging to the elite, advocated by authors such as Pliny and Cicero, even if this dualism is frequently found even in

the most recent scholarship.37 The response of Pausanias, whose journeying in Greece

in the second century Elsner describes as a pilgrimage, serves as a good example to

counter this view. Pausanias certainly came from an educated, upper class background

in Lydia (more precisely Magnesia-on-Sipylos) that allowed him to undertake leisurely

travel not only within Greece, but also throughout other parts of the Mediterranean,

including Egypt. In one case at Corinth, Pausanias remarks that some statues sculpted

by Daidalos are uncouth (ἀτοπώτερα) to look at, yet at the same time imbued with

divine presence (ἔνθεον), a sentiment that encapsulates his aesthetic sensibilities and knowledge of their art historical origins as well as his respect for the religious status of the images that he encountered on his journey.38

Recent scholarship on Late Antiquity has generally emphasized the non-religious

role of pagan sculpture during this period. To what degree was this also true for earlier periods? And if such a difference existed, how can it be

established which statues were the object of worship and which were not? Without an archaeological context, this is

in fact not an easy question to answer, and even in cases where such information is

available, there are numerous interpretive problems.39 Size is often used as one of the main identifiers of a cult image but it cannot be the sole determinor of an image's role, that statues acted as "mediators" between the divine and the worshipper. See also Freedberg 1989: 189-190; Nasrallah 2010: 230-233.

35 Dodds 1951: 240-241.

36 Maximus of Tyre, *Or*. 2.10 (εἰ θεοις ἀγαλματα ἱδρυτέον = "Images of the Gods"), trans. Trapp.

37 Nigel Spivey has previously pointed this out in a fifth-century Greek context (1996: 80). The categories of 'high' and 'low' views of the agency of images in the context of late antique Christianity were adopted more or less wholesale by Cyril Mango in his classic article on pagan statuary in the cityscape of Constantinople (1963).

38 Paus. 2.4.5. On Pausanias as pilgrim, see Elsner 1995: 125-155. Pausanias mentions *agalma* no less than 694 times and *xoana* 97 times in his travelogue, a measure of the value and importance that he ascribed to cult images (see Pritchett 1999: 168). On Pausanias' references to Daidalos, see Pritchett 1998: 197-204. On Pausanias' social background, see Hutton 2005: 30-53.

39 For a recent overview of this issue, refer to Mylonopoulos 2010b. For general categorization of cult and votive images, see Renfrew 1985: 22-24.

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and the proper size of a cult image was in fact already discussed in Antiquity.40 The simple, although in the case of colossal statues, extremely arduous act of removing a

sculpture from a temple to a secular context could furthermore negate a statue's role

in cult practices (cf. Table 0.1). This was the fate of many of the most famous cult

images from Antiquity, such as the Athena Promachos and Olympian Zeus that were

both moved to Constantinople where they were displayed in entirely different contexts

from their original setting in temples.41 The importance of the proper spatial location of cult statues is also noted by Artemidorus of Daldis in his second-century work on

the interpretation of dreams. If dreamers saw them outside such contexts, "everything

that they say is nothing but a lie and a deception."42 Yet the issue of location also works the other way round, since all representations of divinities could at some level have

offered the potential for worship as well as holding a religious meaning to be read by ancient viewers, even when they were displayed in a seemingly secular context.43 Thus

we should not imagine the concept of a cult image to be static (if we can even accept

that such a closely defined concept existed throughout Antiquity). As in the case of

many modern examples, divine images in all media have always benefited from slippages

in terminology and categorization.

The power of cult images did not depend wholly on a specific sacred space. The ritual

of consecration is in many religions a crucial stage at which the divine status of particular images is confirmed and enforced, which is richly attested to in Egypt and Meso-

potamia.44 We know relatively little about such rituals (the so-called *consecratio*) in the Roman context, except from the problematic evidence of magic texts and a few other

categories of a largely disjointed nature.45 Contrary to what is apparent in, for example, Buddhism, where priests and monks are heavily involved in the making of divine images, 40 See, e.g., the discussion of the statuary from the sanctuary of Diana at Nemi in Bilde & Moltesen 2002:19-24; Romano 2006: 84-89. The over-life-size statues are here labeled 'cult statues' and the smaller images are given the label 'votive statuettes'. For another case where size is considered as the main evidence for identifying a statue as a cult image, see Geominy 2008. On the colossal size of cult images, see also Ruck 2007: 51-73. On antique discussions of the right size of cult statues, see Gordon 1979: 14-15.

41 On the display context of the Pheidian Zeus in Constantinople, see Mango, Francis, & Vickers 1992. On the Athena Promachos, see Frantz 1988: 76-77 (suggesting a date of 465-470 for its removal from the Acropolis); Hurwit 1999: 286-287. Yet there is also evidence to suggest that the removal of a cult image did not diminish its religious significance, cf. the story of how a cult image of Athena was moved to the house of the pagan philosopher Proclus in Athens, see Stirling 2005: 204. In another case from the so-called House of Proclus, what may have been the cult statue from a nearby Isaeum was recut as a bust, see Stirling 2005: 201-202. Did such reuse confirm or negate the powers of a cult image?

42 *Oneirocritica* 4.72 (trans. White), and see Miller 1994: 30-31; Elsner 2007: 30.

43 See the important discussions of the religious meaning of domestic sculpture in Touchette 1995: 32-36; and Stewart 2008a: 133; as well as the evidence compiled in Jashemski 1979: 115-150 (on the religious role of statuary in Pompeian gardens) and Bakker 1994 (on private religion at Ostia).

44 Mesopotamia: Winter 1992. Egypt: Meskell 2004: 109-115.

45 See

PGM XII.14-95 for the magical animation of an Eros doll.

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there is no evidence from the Greco-Roman period that the images of divinities required the special supervision of religious authorities at the production stage.46 Both mythological and non-mythological statuary could be produced in the same workshops, although

for especially large commissions such as Pheidias' cult statue of Zeus at Olympia, a purpose-built structure was occasionally required.47 In the fourth century B.C., there does appear to have been a difference in status between sculptors of men (ἀνδριαντοποιοί)

and sculptors of divinities (ἀγαλματοποιοί), which may also have been the case in the

Roman period.48 The erection of honorary sculpture could be marked by public feasting, and it is probable that this was also the case when new cult statues were introduced.49

A group of Augustan altars shows a scene of the dedication of new shrines, where the

cult image (in the form of a statuette) is handed over to the community of worshippers by a *togatus*, who should certainly be interpreted as the emperor, a scene that plays in a typically Roman imperial fashion with one of the conventional narratives of the divine origins of cult images, namely their descent from the sky.50 In this case, however, it is the emperor that takes the role of the consecrating divinity.

During the process of making a statue, certain acts have a particular significance

in several religious traditions as they can be seen to imbue the image with agency;

most notable among these is the insertion or painting of the eyes.51 Counted among

Daidalos' primary artistic achievements was his ability to render the eyes of a statue in their open form, thus giving them some of the divine presence that was recognized by

Pausanias.52 Two unique marble inscriptions from Rome mention *ocularii*, makers of eyes for statues.53 Was this simply a case of increasing specialization among workshops or could it have been a ritually enforced requirement in some cases?54 The colouring

(and gilding) of cult statues presents similar problems.55 Was this an artistic device, a religious requirement, or a combination thereof? As we shall see below in a case from

46 Tambiah 1984: 243-257; Swearer 2004; and see Meskell 2004: 109-117.

47 For a Roman workshop producing both divine images and portraits, see the Aphrodisias workshop (Van Voorhis 2012 with further bibliography). On Pheidias' workshop at Olympia: Mallwitz & Schiering 1964; Schiering 1991. One could argue that the construction of a special building at

Olympia was a practical measure, but it also reveals that it was not deemed to be appropriate to construct the image *in situ*. A similar building has been identified on the Athenian Acropolis, possibly linked to Pheidias' work there on the Athena Parthenos, see Hurwit 1999: 187-188.

48 As noted by Stewart 1979: 109 and discussed in the Roman context by Stewart 2008a: 21.

49 Hands 1968: 187, D.26-27.

50 Moede 2010.

51 Tambiah 1984: 255-257; Freedberg 1989: 51-52; 84-87; 242-244.

52 On Daidalos, see Diod. Sic. 4.76.

53 The first, *CIL* 6.9402, mentioning a *faber oculariarius* by the name of L. Licinius Patroclus, was found on the Via Appia. The second, *CIL* 6.9403, was found in a grave at Porta Capena and is now in Florence. It gives the name of M. Rapilius Serapio (*oculos reposuit statuis*). See also Stewart 2008a: 29.

54 Stewart sees it as a "rather surprising specialisation" of the workshop process (2008a: 29).

55 See now Bradley 2009 for a review of recent work on the polychromy of (representations of) cult statues.

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Plastic figurine with votives, set **Fig. 1.4.**

up in the streets of Mexico City

(photo: author).

late antique Carthage, the gilding of a statue could certainly be ascribed very particular meanings in the religious conflicts of Late Antiquity, at least rhetorically.

This discussion has emphasized the importance of exploring the disparate views on

religious images that existed within the Roman world and critically engaging with the

evidence that treats divine representations as living images, in so far as it sheds light on particular visual practices in Roman society. Additionally, a number of important

questions are posed by juxtaposing the Greco-Roman evidence with recent scholarship

on religious visual culture that adopts a cross-cultural perspective.56 What we can focus on, then, are the different ways in which divine presence was evoked by the interplay of space and image in Roman sanctuaries.57 In modern scholarship on divine representation there has been too much emphasis on rigid categories, aesthetics, and the size and attribution of a small number of cult images that were famous in Antiquity. However,

both ancient and contemporary evidence suggests that even poorly constructed, aesthetically mediocre images that were small in size and made of cheap materials could play

an important role in religious practices (Fig. 1.4). There is thus also a need to consider 56 See esp. work by Morgan (1998; 2005) and Freedberg 1989; Davis 1997.

57 Important in this context is work by Elsner (1995: 88-124; 2007).

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ordinary cult images and their role in the mediation of religious experiences. As acknowledged by Pausanias, archaic-looking statues could be a powerful way of evoking

divine presence, and archaizing styles may indeed have been one way of flagging the

religious connotations of a divine image.58

Securing divine presence through representation was a chief concern of Roman

religion as well as the architects and sculptors that were involved in the construction of sacred spaces and images. This point is again most explicitly stated in the context of Christian confrontation with traditional visual practices. In the discussion of the altar and statue of Victory in the Curia, referring to its role as the place where oaths were sworn, Symmachus observed that “to have it borne upon you that are in the presence

of divine being [*praesentia numinis*, the presence of the divine] is a powerful influence to make you fear to do wrong.”59 In the following section, I will look at how divine

presence was manifested through visual means in two Roman sanctuaries, to introduce

the background to the Christian responses that emerged during the course of Late

Antiquity.

Staging Divine Presence

This section focuses on the sculptural ensembles of two sanctuaries in Rome of the third and fourth centuries respectively, and the ways in which divine presence was mediated

through visual and other means in these places. The first sculptural ensemble comes

from a mithraeum constructed in the late third century near the Circus Maximus. It

owes its present name, the Circus Maximus Mithraeum, to this location. The second

ensemble originates from the so-called Syrian sanctuary on the Janiculum, whose last

phase dates to between the middle and the end of the fourth century, and thus takes

us up to the time when Christian attacks on pagan images were first reported. Both of

these sanctuaries differ in important ways from many of the more well-known public

temples in Rome. In particular, they are highly focused on their interiors, both in

terms of the overall lack of an open *temenos* (especially striking in the case of the Circus Maximus Mithraeum) and in the juxtaposition of cult image and sacrifice inside the

sanctuary. This sets them apart from the norm; in most other sanctuaries the altar was usually placed outside the temple.

The Circus Maximus Mithraeum is in all aspects considered to be relatively small

and ordinary (Figs. 1.5-6).60 The mithraeum was not part of organized state cult, but

58 However, a problem with the archaizing statuary that dates from the Roman period is that most of it is less than life-size and therefore does not live up to modern expectations of cult images (whether these are correct or not). On archaizing Roman statuary, see Fullerton 1990. He concludes that "The few large [archaizing] statues that do exist may have been cult images, but we have no clear evidence to this effect" (p. 197).

59 Symmachus,

Relat. , 3.5, trans. Barrow.

60 On the Circus Maximus Mithraeum, see Pietrangeli 1940; *LTUR* 1996: 3.266-267; Coarelli 2007: 321-323; Claridge 2010: 298-299. In antiquity the mithraeum was separated from the Circus Maximus by a road, and was not strictly speaking related to this public building. It is, however, **52**

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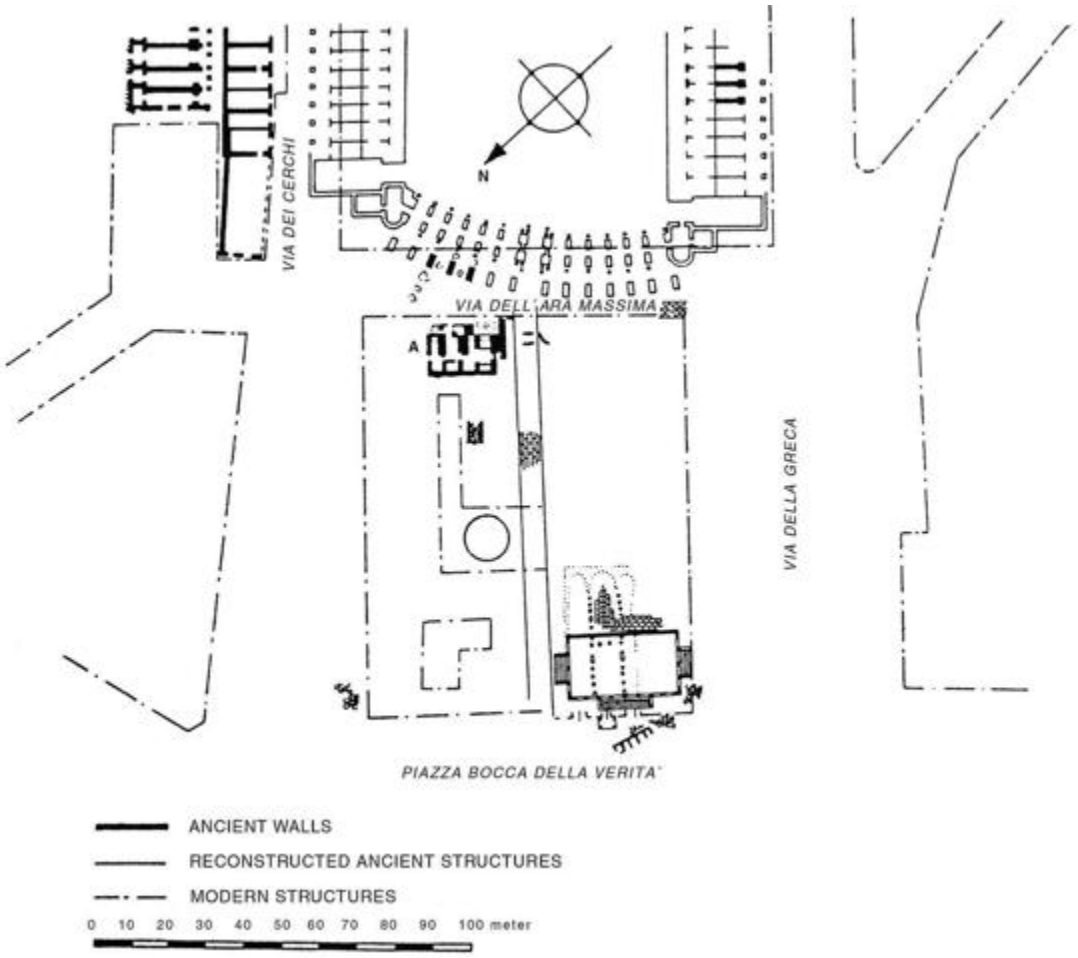

Location of the Circus Maximus Mithraeum, Rome, marked by the letter A (after Pietrangeli 1940: **Fig. 1.5.**

163, Fig. 12). The Circus Maximus is located immediately to the south of the mithraeum.

a private initiative.61 Nor was the sanctuary purpose-built, as it appropriated the base-ment of a second-century building with a monumental staircase facing the Circus

Maximus.62 This underground location gave it the cave-like feel that many mithraea

strived to obtain. When discussing the statuary found in the sanctuary during excava-

tions in 1931, I deliberately pay only minimal attention to the iconographic scheme

the name most commonly used for the mithraeum today. On the topography of the mithraeum's surroundings, see Pietrangeli 1940: 162-166.

61 This point is not necessarily important to my discussion of the role that the sanctuary's images would have played for worshippers. Access may have been limited to (male) initiates, but I have chosen this particular sanctuary since it is relatively well-documented and provides a manageable number of images with which to discuss some important features of Roman visual practices. On the exclusion of women in the Mithraic cult, see the summary discussion in Griffith 2005. On Mithras worshippers, see also Gordon 1994. The epigraphic evidence from the Circus Maximus Mithraeum gives us a series of names associated with the sanctuary, see Pietrangeli 1940: 169-172.

62 Coarelli identifies the building as the *Secretarium Circi Maximi* (2007: 321). Such accommodation of mithraea in existing buildings was common, e.g., at Ostia.

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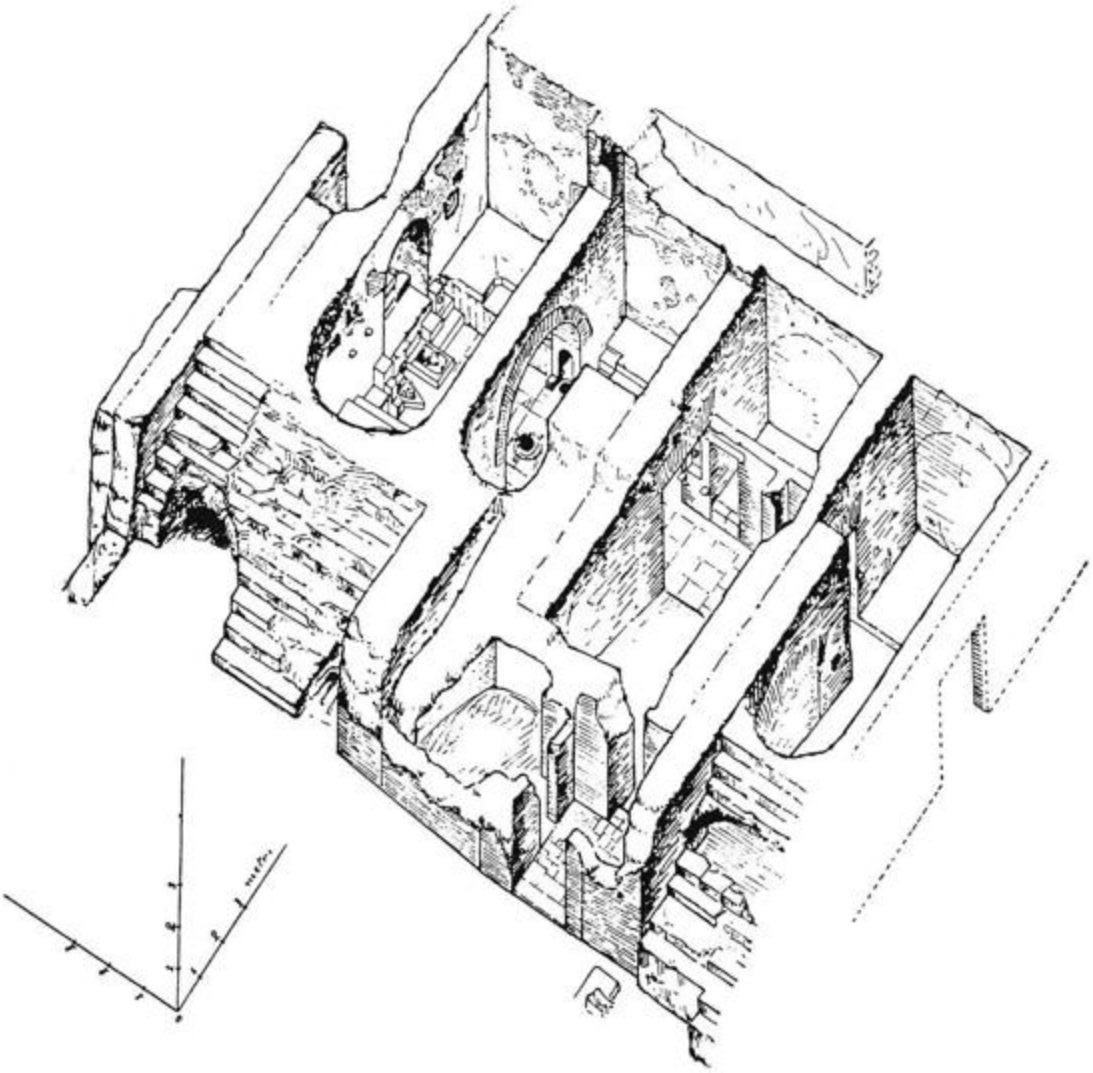

Fig. 1.6. *Axonometric view of the Circus Maximus Mithraeum, Rome (after Pietrangeli 1940: 150, Fig. 6).*

that is so particular to Mithraism and to which a vast amount of scholarship has

been devoted.63 Instead, I focus on how the images interact with other objects and

the space of the mithraeum.64

The Circus Maximus Mithraeum consisted of three consecutive rooms, of which

the first was directly accessible from the street through a small ante-room. The first images that the visitor would have encountered were placed in a pair of small niches

facing each other in an archway. The excavator suggested that these niches held statu-

63 On Mithraism in general, see Clauss 2000 (pp. 52-56 focuses on cult images in mithraea). On the visual culture of Mithraic sacrifice, see Elsner 1995: 210-221.

64 While this mithraeum belonged to a mystery cult that was only accessible to initiates, the images on display would have been visible to all members of this group, even though some could have been veiled or covered by other means. Hangings, sometimes painted, are known from epigraphic sources from other mithraea, see Clauss 2000: 50; 52.

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ettes of Cautes and Cautopates.65 Statuettes of the *dadophoroi*, Mithras' torch-bearing companions, were often placed at entrances to mithraea to demarcate the beginning

of the sanctuary's sacred space.66 The images themselves are in this case long gone but their marble bases remain in place. Supporting mounts for shelves onto which votives

could be placed are found in front of both niches. That these images were the object of cult activity is clear from finds in their vicinity, which include terracotta lamps, bone fragments, and a bronze bell.67 One of the lamps had a central motif showing Victoria

and various objects that have been interpreted as the *strenae* (gifts) that were given on the first day of the New Year.68 The scene may be indicative of the occasion of this

particular offering in the mithraeum. Further evidence of the ritual function of the two niche images is found in the form of the two altars placed immediately beneath them.69

One of the altars had a small cavity at the top for the insertion of a statuette.70 Such altars were frequently dedicated to the *dadophoroi* and their placement here underlines the fact that this part of the mithraeum was specifically dedicated to them.

Having entered the sanctuary through the archway with the two niches, the visitor

stepped into the sanctuary proper. This part of the sanctuary was divided into two

smaller rooms by the supporting walls of the building above the mithraeum. At the

sides of both rooms there were podia for ritual dining, a feature common to many

mithraea. In the wall separating the main room there were another two niches, in this

case semi-circular, and at least one of them appears to have been used for lustral water, an important part of Mithraic ritual. At the far end of the sanctuary and aligned with the small archway that contained images of the *dadophoroi* is the most important part of the sanctuary, a semi-circular *aedicula* that incorporated pumice to give it an appropriate grotto-like appearance. The importance of the *aedicula* is emphasized by its elevated position, with a series of steps leading up to it, and the rich use of marble and alabaster on the flooring immediately in front of it. The main cult relief would originally have stood immediately below the *aedicula*. This image was found out of context and is today 65 Pietrangeli 1940: 153. The

niches, originally covered in stucco, are termed c' and c" by the excavator. They are 1.09 m tall and c. 30 cm deep. Comparable niches were also found in the mithraeum underneath S. Prisca on the Aventine, one of which held a (headless) statue of Cautes (originally Mercury), see Vermaseren & Van Essen 1965: 133; 341, no. 19; pls. XII, 2; LXXVI, 1-4.

66 Clauss 2000: 49.

67 Pietrangeli 1940: 154. The bells had a special function in Mithraic rituals and were sometimes hung over the cult images, see Clauss 2000: 53.

68 Pietrangeli 1940: 154; 172-173, fig. 16. On the use of lamps and lighting effects in mithraea, see also Clauss 2000: 120-130. The pagan tradition of giving such gifts for New Year was condemned by Christian writers, such as Tert., *De idol*. 10; 14.

69 Pietrangeli 1940: 154.

70 On altars in mithraea, see Clauss 2000: 57-60. The placement of altars inside the sanctuary is a peculiarity of Mithraism, but is also observable in the case of the Syrian sanctuary on Janiculum.

In most other cults, the altars where sacrifices were made were placed outside.

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Fig. 1.7. *The main cult image in the Circus Maximus Mithraeum, Rome (photo: author, by permission of the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma).*

placed on a podium to the left of the *aedicula* (Fig. 1.7).71 It shows Mithras slaughter-ing the bull, with the *dadophoroi* as well as Sol and Luna on each side of him. On its upper edge is carved an inscription that gives the name of the donor of the cult image (simply referred to here as *typum*), one Tiberius Claudius Hermes.72 The human agency behind the cult image was thus clearly displayed, linking one individual worshipper to the visual manifestation of divine presence. In front of the *aedicula* stood an altar as well as two bases that originally would have held more statuettes, perhaps again of Cautes

and Cautopates.73 The multiple presences of the *dadophoroi* and their small scale have 71 Colini 1932; Pietrangeli 1940: 156. On the date of the relief, Colini concludes: “Le particolarità di tecnica e di stile che ho

cercato di illustrare collocano l'interessante rilievo nel III sec. d. C.; ma i caratteri della iscrizione appostavi spingono a portarlo verso la fine di esso" (1932: 130).

72 Inscription in full: "Deo Soli Invicto Mithrae Ti Cl Hermes ob votum Dei typum d d" (Pietrangeli 1940: 166, no. 1). On diversity in the use of vocabulary for cult images, see the discussion in Stewart 2003: 19-45. The relief itself is a reused architectural element, see Colini 1932: 124-125, fig. 2.

73 Pietrangeli 1940: 156. The main altar is that assigned the letter i by the excavator, see Pietrangeli 1940: 157.

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parallels in the display of religious figurines so common in, for example, present-day Mexico and many other Catholic countries (cf. Fig. 1.4).

Several other images were found in the mithraeum, demonstrative of the multi-

plicity of cult images in sanctuaries: this is another topic that has so far not received enough attention in scholarship. Often the focus is on *the* cult statue. Yet the visual presence of multiple divinities is important in understanding Roman sacred space and

visual practices. To the left of the main cult image would have been another, although now lost relief (its supports are still visible in the wall).74 Others, such as statuettes of Minerva and Venus, are indicative of the religious plurality of the use of this sacred space.75 A smaller relief reproducing the same *tauroctonos* scene as the main cult image was found on the floor (now relocated to the wall to the right of the niche).76 The

fact that this second relief reproduces the same iconographical schema as the main cult

image is another reminder of the role of reproduction: images may look similar and be

produced in large numbers (and various sizes) but still function successfully as mediators of religious experiences.77 One could even argue, as Greg Woolf has done in relation to Jupiter columns, that reproduction enforces cult as each image both confirms the cosmic order and makes it real and accessible in the religious landscape.78 To this ensemble

of stone images, we should probably add numerous painted images, which are better

preserved in other mithraea (for example, that of S. Stefano Rotondo), as well as stucco (as evident at S. Prisca on the Aventine).79

As an ensemble, the statuary in the Circus Maximus Mithraeum would have ap-

peared similar to several other mithraea. It does not provide any evidence for the

ritual animation of statues, suggesting that this was not necessarily a requirement but an option selected under very specific circumstances. Ultimately, what is interesting

about the images in this particular mithraeum is how very ordinary they are, and how

reproduction, space, text (votive inscriptions, graffiti, and liturgy) and objects (lamps, bells, etc.) correlate to make divine presence visually and materially manifest to worshippers.80 Can we recreate how a devotee of Mithras would have responded to the images

74 Pietrangeli 1940: 157-158. On the reproduction of cult images, see also Gaifman 2006.

75 Pietrangeli 1940: 168, no. 5 (Minerva), nos. 7, 8 (Venus).

76 Pietrangeli 1940: 166-167, no. 2.

77 See also Ando 2008: 42.

78 See Woolf 2001: “Each Jupiter column might be read as an assertion that Jupiter Optimus Maximus was forever triumphant over chaos, high above the other gods and men, yet only a column (or a vow) away” (p. 126).

79 S. Stefano Rotondo: Lissi-Caronna 1986: 24-28. S. Prisca: Vermaseren & Van Essen 1965.

80 The images in the Circus Maximus Mithraeum share many of the characteristics of cult images as observed by David Morgan (2005: 55-74). According to Morgan, cult images perform a variety of functions in society: They order space and time. They serve as icons that enforce a community identity, something that was already observed in the case of the Ephesian Artemis on coinage.

As physical objects, they offer a means of communicating with the divine. They are the centre of communal experiences of divine presence. They are an intricate part of the religious environ-Making and Breaking the Gods

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Fig. 1.8. *Cult relief from the S. Stefano Rotondo mithraeum, now in the Museo Nazionale Romano Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (photo: author, by permission of the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma).*

in this mithraeum?81 What were his expectations of these particular images? While they reproduce standard scenes from Mithraic iconography, they are likely to have had a very particular meaning to those who attended rituals. Many of the images were originally

painted in bright colours, which would have been very striking in the dark cave-like

room. The experience of the image in the dark is hard to recreate, but as Manfred

Clauss has pointed out more generally, the use of light to highlight particular scenes or images as the Mithraic narrative unfolded would have been particularly effective.82 For example, in the case of another *tauroctonos* relief from S. Stefano Rotondo, gilding was applied to the

figure and knife of Mithras, and various hues of red emphasize the ritual blood let in the narrative (Fig. 1.8).83 The contrasts between light and dark as well as the use of sound (evident from the find of bells) would have created a highly charged

and evocative religious space. As such, the images in the mithraeum participate in the creation of a particular worldview as they shaped the sacred space around them. They

were at the centre of a communal experience of the divine and as such reinforced a

ment, collaborating with other forms of representation and media. They can influence thought and behaviour as part of magical practices and displace rival images and ideologies.

81 For a similar question in relation to Jupiter columns, see also Woolf 2001, esp. 125-127.

82 Clauss 2000: 52.

83 Lissi-Caronna 1986: tav. VII–XIV.

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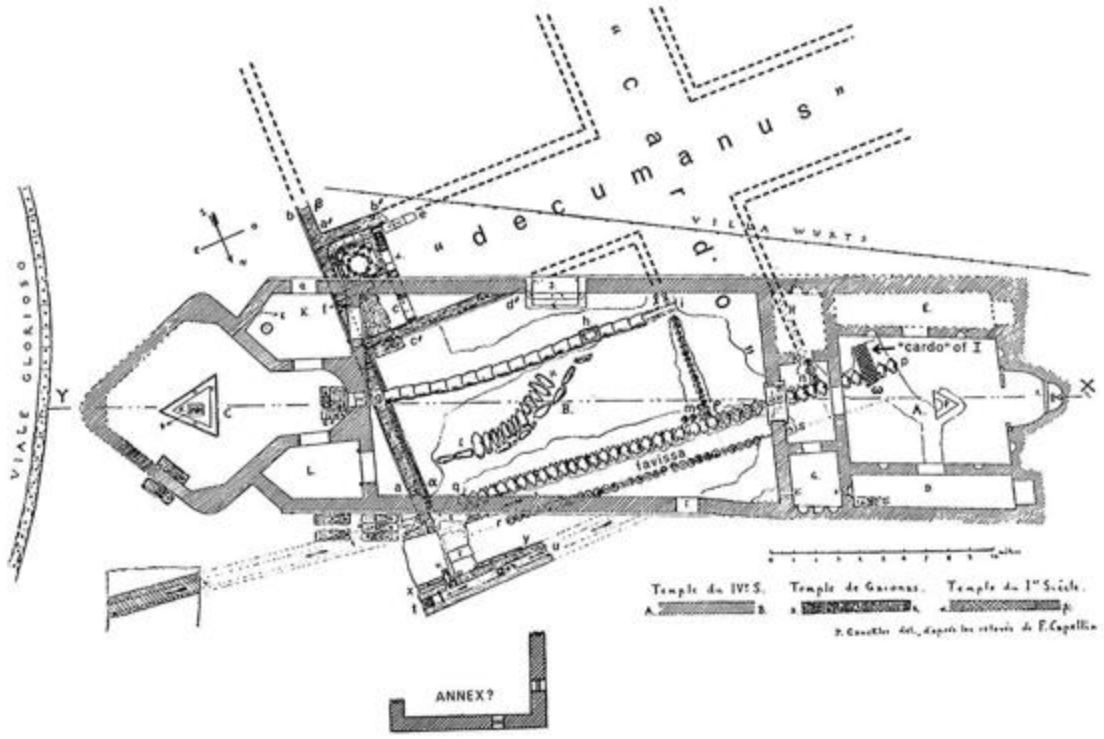

Map of the Syrian sanctuary on the Janiculum (after Goodhue 1975: pl. IX).

Fig. 1.9.

sense of religious identity, particularly through the ritual meals that took place in the sanctuary.84

The Syrian sanctuary on the Janiculum can contribute much to the picture that

emerges from the above discussion of visual practices in the Circus Maximus Mithraeum, especially in demonstrating their continuity into the fourth century (Fig. 1.9).85 It is regarded as a sanctuary typical of late antique paganism, not least because of its eclec-tic ensemble of statuary, including most famously a gilded bronze statuette found in

an intriguing context. The chance discovery of the sanctuary in 1906 was followed

by excavations in 1908-1909 by a team led by Paul Gauckler, again in 1981-1982, and

most recently in 2005-2006. These excavations have identified three main phases of

construction, the first dated to the mid-first century, the second to 176-181, the results of which were probably destroyed in an earthquake or fire around 341, while the third

and final phase was dated to the mid-fourth century; the sanctuary went out of use

84 See also Clauss 2000: 61, commenting that "[w]orship in such small temples implies an experience of community, whose fellowship was fostered above all by the ritual meals."

85 For recent overviews of the sanctuary and its finds, refer to Calzini Gysens 1996; *LTUR* III (1996): 139-143; De Angelis d'Ossat 2002: 294-300 (including map of the sculptural finds); Bottini 2005: 260-269; Coarelli 2007: 353-354; Coates–Stephens 2007: 174; Goddard 2008; Claridge 2010: 408-410.

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Fig. 1.10. *Cult image from the Syrian*

sanctuary on the Janiculum,

now in Palazzo Altemps (photo:

author, by permission of the

Soprintendenza Speciale per i

Beni Archeologici di Roma).

before the end of that century.86 This final phase is on a different orientation from the previous two phases and it is uncertain whether there is any continuity with them, as

their architectural layout is very different (both were open-air *temenoi* that shared a number of other divergent features). It seems clear that the first two phases belong to a sanctuary dedicated to Hadad/Jupiter Heliopolitanus, whereas the identification of

the third phase is less apparent.87 The wider topographic context of the sanctuary was believed by Gauckler, an expert on ancient hydraulics, to be the Lucus Furrinae, a sa-86 The date frequently given for the third phase is the reign of Julian (Richardson 1992: 220; Goodhue 1975: 41). An important piece of evidence for the dating of the third phase is a coin of Constantius II (337-361) that was found among the layers of the second phase, thus providing us with a *terminus post quem* for its destruction.

87 Recently, it was been suggested that the sanctuary was a Serapeum that formed part of a suburban villa, although this is a hypothesis that still needs further substantiation, see Filippi 2008: 33; Goddard 2008: 168. This possible private character of the sanctuary, however, does not detract

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cred grove surrounding a grotto dedicated to the nymphs of the local goddess Furrina that was supplied by an elaborate system of canals that he

comprehensively explored.88

The fourth-century phase of the temple, which will occupy us here, was situated on

a west-east axis, with two buildings on each end separated by a courtyard. The similarity between this rather impressive complex and early Christian architecture was noted

on its discovery. Worshippers would enter the complex through the central courtyard

(which may have been roofed, more of an *atrium* than a courtyard). On the western end lay what was probably the main temple, sometimes known as the basilica or the

western complex. Entry was through a vestibule giving access to small side rooms, each with three niches on the back walls, and the *cella* proper, where the main cult image would have stood in a central, raised *apsis*. The under-life-sized cult image was found in 23 fragments immediately at the foot of this *apsis*. Now missing its head, its iconography is difficult to decipher, but it may have represented Jupiter or Serapis (Fig. 1.10).89

Further images would have been placed in six niches placed on three of the room's

four walls. Centrally placed and in front of the *apsis*, a triangular base for an altar was found. Traces of wall painting were also found in this room. From the *cella* doorways lead to two oblong side rooms, each containing a large square niche on their (western) back walls and a smaller, rounded niche on their eastern walls. These rooms must have

been very dark, lit only by lamps and candles, creating an atmosphere not unlike that

of the Circus Maximus Mithraeum. The design of one large and two small *cellae* may suggest that the temple's third phase was also intended for the

worship of a (Heliopolitan?) triad of divinities. A building with an unusual architectural layout, known as the

“mystery chapel,” was situated at the far end of the courtyard. Two pentagonal rooms

(K and L) opened up towards the courtyard and an octagonal room with an extension

and an *apsis* was located on the western end. A large number of lamps were found in both buildings, suggestive of the cultic activities that were carried out there.

The best-known sculptural find from the sanctuary is a gilded bronze statuette, whose

identification has been much debated in the scholarly literature.90 The precise identification does not need to concern us here, but it may be noticed that the ambiguous

iconography of the statuette fits well with the overall fluid nature of the sanctuary. Its archaeological context is even more intriguing, as it was found immured below three

bipedales in the triangular room (C) at the octagonal room in the eastern part of the from its value as a source in investigating Roman visual practices, and to some extent finds a parallel in the case of the Circus Maximus Mithraeum where access also was limited to initiates.

88 On the wider landscape of the Syrian sanctuary, see Goodhue 1975: 71-77; Mele et al. 1982: 39-43; *LTUR* III (1996): 193-194; *LTURS* II (2004): 278-283; Filippi 2008: 13-37.

89 Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Altemps, inv. 60922. On the discovery of the cult statue, see Goodhue 1975: 25-26. The best illustrations are those of De Angelis d’Ossat 2002: 296. See also Nicole & Darier 1909: 48-51 (identified as Hades). A reconstruction drawing of the niche with the cult statue can be found in Mele et al. 1982: 55, fig. 3.

Similar niches for cult statues are also found in the early fourth-century phase of the Temple of Roma and Venus.

90 Nicole & Darier 1909: 56-62; Gauckler 1912: 209-220 (Atargatis); Goodhue 1975 (Mercury-Simios); Richardson 1992: 220 (Hadad); Coarelli 2007: 354 (Osiris); Filippi 2008: 32 (Osiris Chronokrator).

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Fig. 1.11. *Syrian sanctuary on the Janiculum, view of the "Mystery Chapel" (photo: author, by permission of the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma).*

sanctuary (Fig. 1.11). Carefully placed around the statuette were seven hen eggs, as well as a number of seeds and dried flowers. Seen in the light of

other evidence from the

sanctuary and its very elaborate burial, it does not seem likely that this bronze statuette was deposited in anticipation of a Christian attack. The room has been interpreted,

when identifying the figure with Adonis and his mystery cult, as a mausoleum for the

image.91 Regardless of how we identify the image, it seems to represent a deposit that was part of the *consecratio* of the temple itself; through this ritual the sanctuary was endowed with visual power.

Other statuary from this western part of the sanctuary had also been buried.

Underneath the floor of the south pentagonal vestibule lay a gilded marble statue of

Bacchus.92 Its pedestal was found in the eastern end of the room. The gilding of the

statue's face and hair, as well as the jug in his right hand, has been taken as evidence that it also functioned as a cult image. The top part of the head has been cut off in a straight line, which inspired Gauckler to make a rather fanciful interpretation of this treatment as part of the consecration of Syrian cult images.93 Buried immediately in

91 Goodhue 1975: 67.

92 Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Altemps, inv. 60920; illustrated in De Angelis d'Ossat 2002: 298-299. See also Nicole & Darier 1909: 36-45; Goodhue 1975: 35-36.

93 Discussed and refuted in Crawford 1913. There are several examples of similar slices that have nothing to do with *consecratio*, e.g. the Tivoli General, now in Palazzo Massimo.

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Syrian sanctuary on the Janiculum, view of the main cella *(photo: author, by permission of the* **Fig. 1.12.**

Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma).

front of niche M were eight fragments of a basalt statue of a pharaoh, adding to the

Egyptian flavour of the sanctuary.94 Under the floor of the north pentagonal vestibule there was a small marble group on a triangular base, representing the Horae, Hecate,

or possibly the Nymphs of Furrina.95 All of these sculptures pre-date the sanctuary’s

last phase of use.96

The statue burials offer intriguing insights into the end of the sanctuary's life in the final part of the fourth century. However, they also pose questions of wider importance.

94 Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Altemps, inv. 60921; illustrated in De Angelis d'Ossat 2002: 264. Nicole & Darier 1909: 45-48; Goodhue 1975: 36-37; Richardson 1992: 220.

95 Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Altemps, inv. 60923; illustrated in De Angelis d'Ossat 2002: 300. See also Nicole & Darier 1909: 51-54. On their discovery, see Goodhue 1975: 37-38. Richardson comments that the group was "evidently broken by iconoclasts" (1992: 220).

96 The sculptures (as well as numerous others of the sanctuary's other furnishings and inscriptions) are certainly earlier in date than the third phase – either they were also visible in the second phase or they could have come from elsewhere. Given their diverse character, this is not an unlikely suggestion. Their dates range from the first and second centuries, showing a continuous development of the sanctuary's visual ensemble, or alternatively, that they originally had stood elsewhere, possible in several different locations (Goodhue 1975: 55-56). This seems to me to be a likely explanation and would account for their very heterogeneous style and iconography. They also show no signs of burning, which makes it unlikely that they adorned the sanctuary during its second phase, when it was destroyed by a fire.

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Considering the fragmentary state of several (but not all) of these statues, the sanctuary may have been targeted by Christian iconoclasts, as several

scholars have noted. It is just as likely, however, that the burial of statuary played an important role in the visual practices of the sanctuary, not least because of the elaborate treatment of the bronze statuette. This last point is supported by the find of a number of tombs within the area of the sanctuary, including three inhumations in room H. The most intriguing of these

finds was a human skull (unfortunately lost immediately after its discovery) that was

deposited in a reliquary-like feature just below the cult image in the main *apsis* of room A (Fig. 1.12).97 Gauckler saw this as an example of a human sacrifice carried out as part of the consecration of the temple, as has been observed in some Near Eastern contexts, befitting the origins of the divinities that may have been worshipped here; most of the evidence that he cites, however, is greatly separated in time from the Janiculum sanctuary. He notably saw a parallel with the placement of relics in Catholic altars. Regardless of how the skull ended up in this location, its deposition is an intriguing aspect of the visual practices in the Syrian sanctuary, and Gauckler may well be correct in suggesting that there is a connection to the consecration of the cult image. All of this is then suggestive of the highly ritualized treatment of cult imagery, which we should be careful not simply to place within an Oriental context, as this cannot explain its significance in this Roman (albeit cosmopolitan) setting.

A key point that has arisen from the above discussion of the Circus Maximus

Mithraeum and the Janiculum sanctuary is that Roman divine images did not func-

tion alone. They were orchestrated within a ritual sphere and manipulated by space,

light, and a rich range of ritual behaviour that included sacrifices and meals that have only rarely been documented by archaeologists.98

Different strategies of interaction with images were also apparent, including burial and consecration. The continuity of such

visual practices into Late Antiquity was evident from the discussion of the Janiculum

sanctuary, and can also be observed elsewhere. For example, the impressive (and remarkably intact) sculptural ensemble from a mithraeum in Sidon has been epigraphically

dated to 389-390, although it must be noted that this is a uniquely late example.99 These observations are important, since it is precisely the highly ritualized treatment of cult images that Christian authors objected to and that would come to play a prominent role in the religious conflicts of Late Antiquity. It was thus not necessarily pagan sculpture in itself that Christians objected to, but rather the potential that they offered to be the 97 Gauckler 1912: 86-92; Goodhue 1975: 29. The teeth and jawbones had apparently been removed before deposition. For the similar case of the deposition of two human skulls in the *cella* of the Iseum at Pompeii, see La Rocca 1976: 162.

98 Morgan 2005: 64-67. For further discussion of this point in the Roman context, see Lane Fox 1986: 134-137. For a somewhat uneven treatment of the use of light in Greek religious practices, see Parisinou 2000. The book's chapter on divine images (81-100) unfortunately only covers iconographic aspects.

99 There has been discussion of this date based on the Seleucid chronology, see Will 1950; Hopfe 1990a: 2220-2222; Baratte 2001.

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object of sacrifice and other rituals. Christian responses to images were in this way part of an ongoing negotiation of visual practices in late antique society and religion that concerned the appropriate method of engaging with and using images. In the example

of the Syrian sanctuary on Janiculum, Christian responses have indeed played an im-

portant role in the interpretation of the last phase of pagan temples, which is also the case with several mithraea in other parts of the Roman world.100 Whether making or

breaking images, pagans and Christians alike made powerful statements on the nature

of divine presence.

Breaking the Gods: Christian Perspectives

Having considered these aspects of the use of images in Roman religion, we can now

turn to a more detailed discussion of how Christians conceptualized and responded to

pagan statues in Late Antiquity. The responses that can be observed demonstrate both

continuity (not least in the continued importance of the display and use of images in

sacred and urban space) and change in that Christian thinking on images ("idols")

consciously diverged from pagan visual practices. Christian forms of representation

as they developed from the fourth century onwards ultimately came to have a rather

different character from those that were predominant during the pagan period. The

fifth and sixth centuries experienced a sharp drop in the production of statuary in the round; it had effectively ceased by the early seventh century. This is especially clear in the case of portrait statuary, which is more easily datable than mythological sculpture.101

Imperial legislation furthermore actively sought to repress certain Roman visual prac-

tices, now framed as idol worship. However, opposition to certain visual practices was, as we saw earlier, by no means new to Roman religion or philosophy. As was remarked

in the introduction to this chapter, Christian polemic against cult statuary must also be seen in light of the long-running tradition of theological critique of *superstitio*. Nor was early Christianity a static entity, a fact that emphasizes the importance of discussing the chronology and diversity of the responses that can be observed in the sources. In

the following I shall pay special attention to issues of agency, chronology, and motivation. I will also emphasize the degree to which Christian discussions of pagan images

functioned as rhetorical exercises of biblical topoi that often had very different agendas than providing readers with an accurate narrative of historical events.

With its roots in the Judaic tradition and the Mosaic prohibition against idolatry,

early Christianity had from its very beginnings a seemingly troubled relationship with 100 On the destruction of images in mithraea more generally, see Sauer 1996: 37-43 and 2003: 18-19, 79-88. On the Aventine in Rome, excavators also noted the thorough destruction of the cultic decoration in a mithraeum underneath the church of S. Prisca (Vermaseren & Van Essen 1965: 28; 117; 135-136; 241-242; and see also Richardson

1992: 257-258; Coarelli 2007: 343). A similar fate befell the mithraeum underneath S. Stefano Rotondo, see Lissi-Caronna 1986: 46; Claridge 2010: 347.

101 The decline of portrait production is dramatically illustrated in Smith 1985: 218.

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images (see Introduction). Yet even Jewish attitudes towards images had never been static or uniform, a fact that will also be discussed in Chapter 3, which turns to the Near Eastern context. This ambiguity features heavily in the *Abodah Zarah*, the part of the Talmud that discusses the complexities of the religious prohibition against idols in immense detail. The tractate's title can be translated as "idolatry." The responses to sculpture in the round that are prescribed in this text range from complete destruction by pulverization (and subsequent deposition of the remains in a body of water,

specifically the Dead Sea) to rituals of nullification through superficially destructive means, targeting only very specific parts of an image.102 In certain contexts fragments of statuary were also permitted to remain, but not fragments of hands or feet, as these could be used in worship.103 In the Jewish context too, the matter of ritual practice was of utmost importance in distinguishing between image and idol.

Regardless of this ambiguity in the Jewish tradition, verbal attacks on the practices

of idolatry became a regular fixture in Christian writings of the second and third centuries, in particular in apologetic literature. However, there is no

evidence to suggest that Christians attacked pagan temples or images before the end of the third century.104

Before this time, iconoclasm existed only as a rhetorical field that frequently rehashed Biblical topoi. Pagan idols were a common target of scorn and ridicule in early Christian literature, but these treatises were heavily theological in nature. Authors such as Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria repeated over and over again that pagan cult images were nothing but man-made pieces of wood or stone, worthy only of contempt,

the repetition of the motif being highly suggestive of the persistence of contradictory views, both among the pagan and Christian audiences of their writings. Idolatry was

furthermore frequently linked to other sins, such as fornication, placing them firmly

within a network of pagan temptation.105

Often the language used in these tracts is extremely polemical. Paul Finney has, for

example, characterized Tertullian's language as "confrontational, aggressive and rude."106

Yet their argumentation placed the apologists in the middle of a century-old debate concerning the nature of divine representation in Roman religious practices, which discussed the issue of their materiality. Christian writers from the second century onwards repeatedly attacked the human agency of cult images, with Athenagoras asking "how can I call

102 *Abodah Zarah*, 3.3c, trans. Neusner: "One breaks them into pieces and throws the powder to the wind or drops them into the sea." The Dead Sea is mentioned in 3.3a. Compare *Abodah Zarah*, 4.5a–d, trans. Neusner: "How does one nullify it? If he has cut off the tip of its ear, the tip of its nose, the tip of its finger, if he battered it, even though he did not break off any part of it, he has nullified it." The text continues: "If he spit in its face, urinated in front of it, scraped it, threw excrement at it, lo, this does not constitute an act of nullification" (4.5e).

103 *Abodah Zarah,* 3.2a–c, trans. Neusner: “He who finds the sherds of images – lo, these are permitted. If one found a fragment shaped like a hand or a foot, lo, these are prohibited, because objects similar to them are worshipped.”

104 Thornton 1986: 122.

105 On fornication in Jewish and Christian discourses of idolatry, see also Nasrallah 2010: 223.

106 Finney 1994: 20.

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those things gods which I know to have had men for their makers?”107 And Minucius Felix notoriously lampooned each individual step in the making of a cult image:

But perhaps you may say, the stone, wood, or silver is not yet a god: when, then,

does it become one? It is cast, fashioned, and carved, but it is not yet a god; it is

soldered, put together, and set up, but still it is not a god; it is bedecked, conse-

crated, and supplicated; then at last it is a god, since man willed it to be so and

has declared it holy.108

In this exposure of pagan idolatry, Minucius worked from Biblical topoi to suggest that the materiality of divine images was stable and permanent. As pointed out in the Book

of Isaiah, for example, wood cannot be both firewood and then all of a sudden come

to form a divine image.109

Athenagoras puts a philosophical spin on the same sentiments in his second-century

tract *Embassy for the Christians*, addressed to the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus: "If we consider the forms of matter to be gods, we shall be deemed blind to the true God for equating fragile and mortal things with the eternal."110 What Minucius,

Athenagoras, and other apologists offer then are theological discussions that remain

abstract and do not take on a historical dimension. However, they provide useful insights as Christian commentaries on Roman visual practices, ferociously cast as the 'Other.'111

The degree to which these Christian critiques of idolatry need to be interpreted in light of older philosophical discourses is noteworthy and suggests another important link

between the making and breaking of images.112 What we need to understand is thus how

the "crisis of representation" in Roman society, to use Laura Nasrallah's term, developed into the actual destruction of cult images in Late Antiquity that is observable in the archaeological record. That the destruction of idols was not part and parcel of Christian identity is furthermore suggested by statements by Athenagoras that Christians would

107 Athenagoras, *Leg.* 16, trans. Crehan.

108 “Nisi forte nondum deus saxum est vel lignum vel argentum. Quando igitur hic nascitur? Ecce funditur, fabricator, sculpitur: nondum deus est; ecce plumbatur, construitur, erigitur: nec adhuc deus est; ecce ornatur, consecrator, oratur; tunc postremo deus est, cum homo illum voluit et dedicavit” (Min. Fel., *Oct.* 22.5, trans. Freese). He continues in a similar vein to Lucilius: “Mures, hirundines, milvi non sentire eos sciunt: rodunt, indulcant, incident, ac nisi abigatis, in ipso dei vestri ore nidificant: araneae vero faciem eius intexunt et de ipso capite sua fila suspendunt”

(22.6). Minucius also explicitly mentions *imagines consecratas* (22.1).

109 See *Is*. 44.15-16: “No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, ‘Half of it I burned in the fire, I also baked bread on its coals, I roasted flesh and have eaten; and shall I make the residue of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?’”

110 εἰ τὰ εἴδη τῆς ὕλης ἄγοιμεν θεούς, ἀναισθητεῖν τοῦ ὄντως θεοῦ δόξομεν, τὰ λυτὰ καὶ φθαρτὰ

τῷ ἀϊδίῳ ἐξισοῦντες (Athenagoras, *Leg.* 15.4, trans. Crehan).

111 See esp. the discussion in Donohue 1988: 151-164.

112 On this issue, see esp. Nasrallah 2010: 213-248.

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not destroy idols for the sake of firewood, as the fifth-century B.C. atheist Diagoras of Melos had done.113

Things changed with Constantine's conversion that began the slow process by which

Christianity was ultimately to become a hegemonic force across the Mediterranean

world. Yet the reception of Constantine in later times is also instructive of how the

Christian 'triumph' has complicated the nature of the evidence.114 A painting by Pietro da Cortona in the Palazzo Barberini depicts Constantine as a great iconoclast, furi-ously smashing the idols around him.115 This painting (as well as that from the Sala di Costantino in the Vatican represented in Figure 0.3) is testimony to a tradition built on Eusebius' *Life of Constantine,* which identified Constantine with strongly anti-pagan views.116

Eusebius' account was further expanded and elaborated by later Christian authors

who sought to underline the importance of the Roman church by placing Constantine

as its chief protector, perhaps most notoriously in the eighth-century forgery of the

Donatio Constantini that was meant to establish papal authority by way of Constantinian patronage . However, recent work has debunked the historical accuracy of this tradition.

While Constantine closed down a number of temples in the eastern Mediterranean,

he did by no means systematically target paganism or its cult images.117 Scholars have thus emphasized Constantine's pragmatic approach towards traditional cult practices,

including statuary.118 After all, he decorated his new capital with mythological statuary brought from sanctuaries and cities all over the Mediterranean and that was still considered to be part and parcel of the urban fabric.119 From an archaeological perspective, 113 Athenagoras, *Leg.* 4, and see Nasrallah 2010: 198.

114 The literature on Constantine's Christianity is vast, see most recently Van Dam 2003; 2012.

115 *Costantino abbatte gli idoli*, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome. This was part of a series of tapestries, only preserved as sketches, that depict five scenes from the life of Constantine (the others were *Costantino brucia le decretali*, *Costantino uccide il leone*, *la Battaglia navale*, and *Ap-parizione della croce*) commissioned by the cardinal Francesco Barberini in the 1630s.

116 Thus Eusebius' description of Constantine's purge of idols during the re-founding of Constantinople: "Being full of the breath of God's wisdom, which he reckoned a city bearing his own name should display, he saw fit to purge it of all idol-worship, so that nowhere in it appeared those images of the supposed gods which are worshipped in temples, nor altars foul with bloody slaughter, nor sacrifice offered as holocaust in fire, nor feasts of demons, nor any of the other customs of the superstitious" (*Vit. Const*, 48.2, trans. Cameron & Hall). On Eusebius' portrayal of Constantine, see Barnes 1981. On Constantine's attitudes towards pagan images, see Curran 2000: 77-78; 175; 179; Caseau 2001: 108-110.

117 On the destruction of temples during his reign, see Caseau 2001: 86-90; 2004: 120-126. These temples included Aigiai in Cilicia as well as Aphaca and Heliopolis (Baalbek) in Phoenicia. See Euseb., *Vit. Const*. 3.54-58; Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 2.5. The primary motive for the destruction appears to have been the practice of sacred prostitution, but may also have been prompted by a pecuniary crisis.

118 Curran 1996; Barnes 2002.

119 Acknowledged by Eusebius, but also given an unlikely interpretation: *Vit. Const.* 54.4-7. On Constantine's programme of sculptural

embellishment, see Bassett 2004.

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Chapter 1

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it is also clear that very little material in terms of damaged or destroyed sculpture can be securely dated to the Constantinian period. Identifying a wave of religious violence and iconoclasm with Constantine is thus an unviable position.

Constantine's successors followed his religious policies to a large extent, even though the influence of the Church grew steadily in all areas of legislation.120 A reading of the *De Paganis, Sacrificiis et Templis*, the section of the Theodosian Code that compiles the legislation on paganism, makes it immediately clear that the overall concern was

not statuary per se, but worship and sacrifice.121 Where statues are implicated, it is in their function as pagan cult objects. As such, the legislation is best characterized as a reaction to a particular set of visual practices, such as those discussed above. Under Constantius II and Constans, the worship of images was prohibited under threat of

capital punishment.122 Similar prohibitions are repeated several times in the Theodosian Code, although when discussed in conjunction with other religious crimes, it is mentioned last.123 It is made clear that a cult statue should only be destroyed if it was used in worship.124 Pagan statues were thus allowed to remain standing, as long as they were

"measured by the value of their art rather than by their divinity."125 The edicts in the Theodosian Code are, with only one exception, concerned with statues in sacred spaces

and thus laid no restrictions on the display of sculpture in urban or private contexts.126

Those Christians who attacked sculpture in those contexts thus occasionally collided

with civic and imperial authorities.

Another noteworthy aspect of the Theodosian Code's edicts is their emphasis on

maintaining orderly circumstances in the case of temple closures and idol removals.

One edict issued in 399 thus announced that, "[i]dols shall be taken down under the

direction of the office staff after an investigation has been held, since it is evident that 120 A fact that their legislation attests to, see *CTh* 16.10.2, 16.10.3, 16.10.4, 16.10.5, 16.10.6. On Constantius, see Barnes 1989. On the religious policy of Constantius II, see Klein 1977; Barceló 2004.

121 As argued by Stirling 2005: 156-163.

122 *CTh* 16.10.6, issued 20 February 356.

123 For example in *CTh* 16.10.10, issued in 391, where sacrifices and visits to the temples are mentioned before image worship.

124 In 407/408, the following edict was issued under Arcadius: "If any images stand even now in the temples and shrines, and if they have received, or do now receive, the worship of the pagans anywhere, they shall be torn from their foundations" (*CTh* 16.10.19, translation by C. Pharr et al.).

125 "Aedem olim frequentiae dedicatam coetui et iam populo quoque communem, in qua simulacra feruntur posita artis pretio quam divinitate metienda iugiter patere publici consilii auctoritate decernimus neque huic rei obreptivum officere sinimus oraculum" (*CTh* 16.10.8, issued in 382,

trans. C. Pharr et al.). In this case it should be remembered that the edict was issued to Palladius, Duke of Osrhoene, and concerns only the images of one temple, presumably that of Edessa, cf.

Rothaus 2000: 107. See also 16.10.15, which aims to protect public "ornaments."

126 *CTh* 16.10.12, issued in 392, prohibits the worship of the household gods but does not forbid having images of them. This does not, however, mean that mythological statuary in houses was *un*-religious in character.

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even now the worship of a vain superstition is being paid to idols."127 This shows the degree to which imperial legislation was formulated in response to episodes of destruction, rather than having incited them in the first place. In most cases, the edicts also give alternatives to destruction, such as purification through other means or simply

the termination of worship.128 The imperial government was clearly more concerned

with upholding law and order through legislation than advocating the destruction of

statues and temples by means of public rioting, which became an increasing concern

after the so-called Statue Riot in Antioch in 387.129 As we shall later see, this is evident from the emperor's lacklustre response to Porphyry's plans to forcefully Christianize the population at Gaza. The pagan citizens of Gaza were after all also good tax-payers.

Several scholars have pointed to the reign of Theodosius I (379-395) as the period

from which the majority of historical evidence for attacks on pagan monuments and

images can be observed.130 The sources note Theodosius' active repression of paganism, tough enforcement of anti-pagan legislation, and the violence of his Praetorian Prefect of the East, Maternus Cynegius, who was involved in the destruction of several major

sanctuaries in the Near East that I will return to in Chapter 3. This is the period when Libanius voiced his famous attack on monks:

this black-robed tribe, who eat more than elephants… [and] attack the temples

with sticks and stones and bars of iron, and in some cases, disdaining these with

hands and feet. Then utter desolation follows, with the stripping of roofs, demo-

lition of walls, the tearing down of statues, and the overthrow of altars, and the

priests must either keep quiet or die.131

Having been one of the protagonists behind the removal of the Altar of Victory from

the Curia, Ambrose also applauded how Theodosius had "put away the images of the

gentiles; his faith put away all worship of the idols; he laid waste all their ceremonies."132

This evidence for a Theodosian age of iconoclasm is occasionally cited to connect ar-

chaeologically detected cases of Christian destruction with the policies of Theodosius, 127 *CTh* 16.10.18, issued in 399, transl. C. Pharr et al.

128 Among the edicts that explicitly mention images, three (*CTh* 16.10.6; 16.10.8; 16.10.12) deal exclusively with worship, one calls for destruction of idols (16.10.19), and one calls for removal of idols (16.10.18) – what this removal implied is uncertain. Bayliss 2004: 124 lists de-consecrated temples where idols are known from historical sources to have been removed.

129 Notably in *CTh* 16.10.24.

130 Saradi-Mendelovici 1990: 47. For examples of Theodosius' attacks on temples, see Socrates, *Hist.*

eccl., 3.20 (Alexandria) and Joh n Malalas, *Chronicles*, 13.37.

131 οἱ δὲ μελανειμονοῦντες οὗτοι καὶ πλείω μὲν τῶν ἐλεφάντων ἐσθίοντες…καὶ κρατοῦντος τοῦ

νόμου θέουσιν ἐφ᾽ἱερὰ ξύλα φέροντες καὶ λίθους καὶ σίδηρον, οἱ δὲ καὶ ἄνευ τούτων χεῖρας καὶ

πόδας. ἔπειτα Μυσῶν λεία καθαιρουμένων ὀροφῶν, κατασκαπτομένων τοίχων, κατασπωμένων

ἀγαλμάτων, ἀνασπωμένων βωμῶν, τοὺς ἱερεῖς δὲ ἢ σιγᾶν ἢ τεθνάναι δεῖ (Lib., *Or.* 30. 8, trans.

Norman). Libanius also accuses the monks of having pecuniary motives, see *Or.* 30. 11.

132 Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii*, 4, delivered on 25 February 395, cited from Ando 2008: 169.

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Headless statues as reconstructed in the augusteum at Narona (photo: author, by permission of **Fig. 1.13.**

Arheološki Muzej Narona).

for example, the recently excavated augusteum at Narona in Croatia in which 12 head-

less statues were discovered (Fig. 1.13).133 The connection is also supported by pottery finds that suggest a late fourth-century date for the destruction of the augusteum and its statues.

Yet even when acknowledging Theodosius' anti-pagan policies and active persecu-

tion of pagan cult, it is unlikely that we can ascribe all acts of Christian destruction to his reign. In his work on lawmaking during the Theodosian

era, Tony Honoré has

discussed the individual *quaestors* behind the edicts. These include such notable anti-pagan figures as Maternus Cynegius, often described as highly involved in instigating

the religious violence in the east in the late fourth century, but also officials with strong pagan sympathies such as Nicomachus Flavianus. The presence of two such bureaucrats,

radically opposed in religious matters, in the administration of Theodosius I, usually noted for his anti-pagan legislation, is as much testimony to the religious sensibilities of the period as the edicts themselves.134

Theodosius' successors, Arcadius (395-408) and Honorius (395-423), were also in-

volved in the destruction of pagan temples and idols. In the early fifth century, an

unrelenting tone against idolatry is subsequently evident in the edicts. One particular edict, issued in 407, notably declared that "if any images stand even now in the temples 133 Marin 2001; Marin & Vickers 2004.

134 Honoré 1998.

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and shrines, and if they have received, or now receive, any worship of the pagans, they shall be torn from their foundations."135 Porphyry finally received imperial approval in his iconoclastic activities at Gaza in 402, when he destroyed the Marneion

and built a church in its place. However, Arcadius and Honorius had earlier issued

an edict in 399 that sought to protect public buildings and their sculptural decoration from vandalism.136 Mirroring earlier edicts, temples should "be torn down without

disturbance and tumult."137 Legislation issued under Theodosius II (408-450) once

again called for the removal of idols and specifically stated that temples should be

converted for public use.138

On the basis of the Theodosian Code alone, it is difficult to set a fixed date for

when iconoclasm moved from being a rhetorical field to an actual social practice

that came to have a real impact on the sculptural record. The problem is often the

disjuncture between grand-scale, imperial narrative (in the form of legislative texts

that in many cases were only sent to a single community, and historical treatises) and events based on local circumstances of religious and social conflict, which usually

can only be illuminated by some rather specific examples, such as Alexandria in the

fourth and fifth centuries. The closure of temples over the course of these two centu-

ries provided numerous opportunities for a variety of Christian responses to unfold,

including destruction and mutilation. For these reasons, it can be very difficult to use the Theodosian Code as a large-scale historical framework with which to explain local

events, not least when applying its testimony to the less finely grained chronology

that archaeology is capable of providing.139 This also means that there is a great need to look beyond imperial agency to understand cases of Christian destruction. Many

other groups and individuals had a much more direct interest in performing acts of

iconoclasm as a way of promoting their own status and place in society. Demeas'

inscription at Ephesus notably bore witness to one such individual who sought to

enhance his status through the rhetoric of iconoclasm in a public setting (Figs. 0.1-2).

To Demeas and many others, the destruction of idols was a method of confirming

one's faith among the contested religious identities of Late Antiquity, as well as in a very practical sense of protecting oneself against demons.

Among the nameless groups that we can firmly identify as Christian iconoclasts, we

find the mobs that are described as the instigators of some of the most famous cases

of religious violence, such as the destruction of the Alexandrian Serapeum. Mobs did

135 “Simulacra, si qua etiamnunc in templis fanisque consistunt et quae alicubi ritum vel acceperunt vel accipiunt paganorum, suis sedibus evellantur” (*CTh* 16.10.19.1, trans. Pharr). This edict is interesting for also including statues that had received worship at any time. See also *CTh* 16.10.25, issued in 435.

136 *CTh* 16.10.15.

137 “Si qua in agris templa sunt, sine turba ac tumultu diruantur” (*CTh* 16.10.16, trans. Pharr).

138 *CTh* 16.10.19.

139 See, e.g., the discussion of the dating of the destruction of the Temple of Isis at Cumae in Caputo 1998: 252-253. Its destruction is also explained by reference to the Theodosian Code in the recent catalogue from the Museo dei Campi Flegrei, Zevi et al. 2008: 394.

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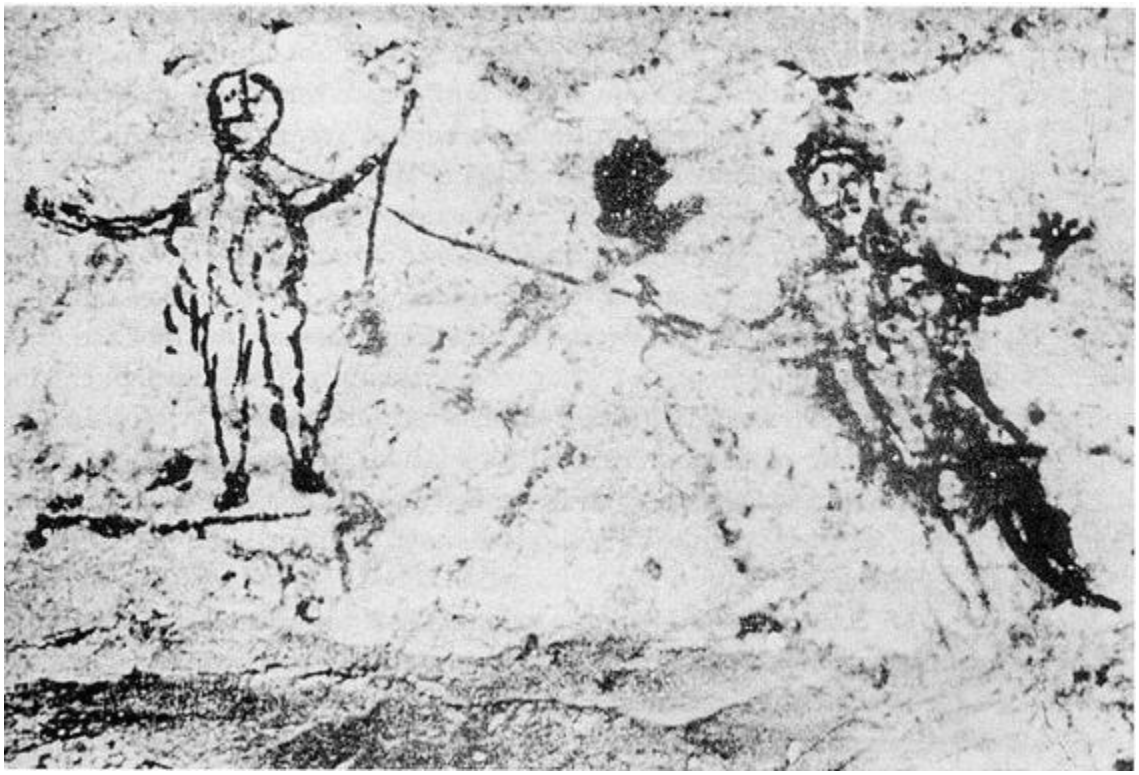

Dipinto *showing a scene*

Fig. 1.14.

of iconoclasm, Via Paisiello

hypogeum, Rome (after Stewart

1999: Fig. 8.3).

not operate independently or randomly, and the ability to control a popular crowd

was always a useful quality in a political or religious leader.140 Assigning violence, and iconoclasm more specifically, to a mob is thus not an explanation in itself, as there is more to mob violence than fanaticism and “mindless” destruction.141 The agency behind any given mob can be elusive at the time and is even more difficult to identify in retrospect. However, we know that bishops had special influence over the urban poor,

and these could be mobilized in times of religious and social conflict.142 A prime target for mob violence had always been statues, whether of emperors fallen from grace or

idols with demonic powers. A *dipinto* that shows a scene of (Christian?) destruction in the Via Paisiello hypogeum in Rome may represent a mob tearing down a cult statue

(Fig. 1.14; although only two iconoclasts are depicted here, it may be assumed that they are stand-ins for a larger crowd), but it is extremely difficult to locate archaeological examples of mob iconoclasm.143 It remains highly likely, however, that mobs of various constellations were responsible for the destruction of pagan sculpture in many instances in Late Antiquity.

Libanius pointed to the destructive actions of monks who feature prominently in

many confrontational narratives.144 The large number of monasteries that were built in rural and suburban districts became important social and religious centres of authority, especially in the eastern Mediterranean, where they served as – to paraphrase the words of one influential scholar – Christian fortresses in a still largely pagan environment.145

140 On late antique violence and riots, see Gaddis 2005 and Watts 2010.

141 Stewart 2003: 283-290.

142 Brown 2002: 45.

143 Caseau 2001: 118. Stewart 2003: 292, n. 143 gives an account of the historiography of this fascinating *dipinto*. It was first brought into the discussion of Christian iconoclasm in Majewski 1965: 64, and, more widely, Bredekamp 1975: 84.

144 Frend 1990.

145 Chadwick 2001: 404.

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The choice of metaphor here is not coincidental, as the violence of monks against temples and statues is encountered repeatedly in the textual sources, not least in Egypt, as we shall see in Chapter 2.146 There are, however, large regional differences in the diffusion and impact of monks and monasteries across the empire. In Greece, monks were thus

not noticeable before the ninth century, whereas their early importance in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt is well-known.147

Behind monks and mobs in many cases stood bishops, who, as Garth Fowden has

shown in an important article, had an interest in the destruction of pagan statues and temples as "a prelude to proselytization of the pagans," and it functions as such in many instances in the Christian narratives of idol destruction.148 Bishops have been assigned a pivotal role in recent years in studies of the transformation of politics and social life in the late antique city.149 They rose to prominence in the fourth century, at the same time that traditional civic bodies, such as the *boulé* in the East, were in decline, thus leaving a power vacuum to be exploited by new prominent figures.150 The (direct as

well as indirect) involvement of bishops in the destruction of sanctuaries and statues is subsequently attested to in numerous cases, although many of these accounts have a

particularly hagiographic character which makes us suspicious of their historical value.

The bishop Marcellus is presented as having set fire to the Temple of Jupiter at Apamea, and the bishop Eleusius of Kyzikus as destroying a number of pagan temples in spite of the disapproval of Julian.151 A particularly vivid and fanciful account of a bishop taking things into his own hands is found in the *Life of Abercius of Hierapolis*, dating back to the late fourth century, where Abercius is encouraged in a dream to destroy the cult

statue of Apollo (and other idols) in his local temple, which he subsequently does under cover of the night.152 The Papyrus Golenišcev makes a direct visual parallel between

an act of iconoclasm and the "victorious" bishop Theophilus of Alexandria, showing

the level of personal authority that was implicit in this famous case, a fact that is also reflected in several of the textual sources (Fig. 1.15).153 The involvement of bishops and other leading church dignitaries may also be hinted at in the archaeological record in cases of the removal of genitals on nude statuary in baths, since they are likely to have 146 See Chapter 2, "Iconoclasm and Triumphal Narratives in the Nile Valley."

147 Rothaus 2000: 37.

148 Fowden 1978: 78.

149 Av. Cameron 2003: 13. See also Brown 2002: 45-73; Hah n 2004; Rapp 2005.

150 Brown 1992: 146-152; Rothaus 2000: 11-12.

151 Marcellus: Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5.21. Eleusius: Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 5.15.4-10.

152 On this text, see now Thonemann 2012.

153 The original publication of the manuscript with excellent colour plates is Bauer & Strzygowski 1906. Theophilus and the Serapeum are shown on

folio VI verso. There is an accompanying fragment of monks throwing rocks (folio VI verso A). The manuscript was probably made in Alexandria, and is now in the possession of the Push kin Museum in Moscow. Suggestions for the date of the papyrus range from the early fifth to the eighth centuries. See also Haas 1997: 179-180; Kiss 2007: 193-194.

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Chapter 1

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A fragment of the Papyrus Goleniščev showing bishop Theophilus standing triumphantly on top of **Fig. 1.15.**

the Alexandrian Serapeum with the cult statue inside (after Bauer & Strzygowski 1906).

had a say in local discussions of bodily decorum.154 While it may altogether be very

difficult to prove the direct involvement of bishops in episodes of iconoclasm, such

responses clearly carried rhetorical and political capital for the protagonists in the texts from the fourth century onwards.

The groups discussed so far – mobs, monks, and bishops – are some of the most

154 It is, e.g., quite likely that the local bishop at Perge was involved at some level in the mutilation of the nude sculpture in the city's South Baths, see Hannestad 2001, and Chapter 3, "Liminal Places and Christian Response at Scythopolis."

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obvious agents of Christian response and are furthermore often represented as such in the textual sources. Yet many other individuals and groups may have been involved. This is suggested, for example, by the genre of hagiography that flourished simultaneously

alongside the official religious policies of the Theodosian Code.155 In hagiographies, it is the demonic (rather than divine) presences in images that are evoked. Unlike

theological writers, these texts are less concerned with what idols *are* than what they *do*. The destruction of idols by saints when others had been unable to was one topos that highlighted the theme of divine intervention in hagiographies, frequently through reference to natural forces, such as fire or lightning.156 This emphasis of their demonic powers made pagan statues worthy but ultimately futile opponents of the saints whose

lives were eulogized. Looking at some of the possible motives behind acts of destruction may help us in further expanding the group of agents behind Christian response, but

this requires direct confrontation of the methodological problems in using hagiographies and other Christian triumphal narratives in the reconstruction of historical events.

Rhetoric and Reality in Christian Texts

Several of the written sources that we have encountered so far belong to the Christian tradition of hagiographies or triumphal church histories. They share the explicit aim

of glorifying their protagonists, whether they are emperors, saints, or bishops. Conflict with pagans (often used in such texts as a catch-all phrase encompassing pagans as well as heretics) frequently features to emphasize the religious authority of the protagonist.

This means that the sources can only be used in a very critical fashion and with an

awareness of their biases and implicit conflation of rhetoric and reality. Although some scholars have argued to the contrary, they should not be entirely discarded as they are among our best sources in illuminating the social context of at least some of the episodes in which Christians destroyed pagan images.157 Hagiographies do not literally reflect

a particular historical reality and are best understood as constituting a framework of social memory that is a useful source in interpreting how certain episodes of religious conflict were remembered and represented. They were under all circumstances read and

copied by people who identified with the issues and the sentiments of the narratives.158

As such, they give us a sense of the agents behind the different late antique responses to images, although admittedly a selective picture of those with

the means to memorialize 155 On the Christianization of pagan temples in hagiographies, see Saradi 2008.

156 For a portrait of St. Martin of Tours as an iconoclast and his destruction of an idol (a Jupiter column?) by means of divine intervention, refer to Stirling 2005: 155-156 and Kristensen forthcoming a. In the case of the destruction of the idol on the Jupiter column, the response to his prayers is a thunderbolt from the sky. The *Life of Shenoute* informs us that a bronze statue at Panopolis was destroyed by fire from the sky (Dijkstra 2008: 89).

157 On the use of hagiography, see Patlagean 1983; Frankfurter 2006; 2008b: 135-136, and his further methodological remarks on pp. 137-138. For a critical view, refer to Dijkstra 2008: 92-93.

158 Indeed Dijkstra notes that “the aim of the hagiographer is not to describe historical events as accurately as possible, but directly to involve his audience in the narrative” (2008: 254).

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their acts through text. The extent of their responses (destructive or otherwise) is an entirely different matter that is best explored by taking in the archaeological evidence.

Much Early Christian literature was highly rhetorical by nature, and many early

Christian authors were trained in the Classical tradition of rhetoric.159 We therefore need to think in terms of audiences: who were these texts written for, and what was

the occasion of their production and transmission? Close study of particular texts has revealed such information in a number of cases. For example, Nina Lubomierski has

shown that the *Life of Shenoute*, attributed to his successor Besa and which will be further discussed in Chapter 2, is in fact an agglomeration of stories that were read to audiences at festivals honouring Shenoute.160 This oral tradition is an important component of

all hagiographies, as they were written specifically to be read aloud at such occasions.161

Unsurprisingly, the use of topoi and literary caricatures was a conventional feature

of these performative histories, which played a particular role in tying a community

together and upholding a group identity, often through the representation of a shared

past.162

The destruction of idols was a popular topos that was constructed from Biblical epi-

sodes of iconoclasm, such as Elijah's confrontation with the priests of Baal, and as such lived up to the conventional expectations of a particular audience.163 Among likeminded listeners, it would have been easy (perhaps even expected) to dramatize and exaggerate.

These texts thus attest to a specific kind of rhetoric of intolerance, and their historical value should for this reason be assessed with a very critical eye.164 Yet in spite of these problematic aspects, most hagiographies are tied to real landscapes and engage with

events that in many cases are likely to have a historical core.165 In the following, I will look at the famous case of Mark the Deacon's *Life of*

Porphyry, and especially the events in Gaza in 402, to explore some of these issues concerning the use of hagiography as a source for social history.

Gaza was one of the major urban centres of the Roman Near East.166 Its continued

importance in Late Antiquity is suggested by the fact that it is depicted as the second largest city on the Madaba mosaic map, exceeded only by Jerusalem.167 At the end of

159 Gamble 1995: 35.

160 Lubomierski 2006; 2007; and see Frankfurter 2006: 16.

161 Saradi 2008: 114.

162 Frankfurter 2006: 19-20.

163 This is evident in the destruction of the idols of the "Kothos" worshippers (see Chapter 2,

"Iconoclasm and Triumphal Narratives in the Nile Valley"). On destruction of pagan images and temples as a Christian literary *Leitmotif*, see Caseau 2001: 79-86.

164 On the Christian rhetoric of intolerance, see Kahlos 2009.

165 Frankfurter 2006: 23-28.

166 On Gaza in Late Antiquity, see also Downey 1963; Bitton-Ash kelony & Kofsky 2004; Hah n 2004: 191-222; Saliou 2005; Sivan 2008: 328-347. On the city's topography, see Glucker 1987; Weiss 2004. On recent excavations in the city and its surroundings, refer to Sadek, Hassuneh,

& Humbert 1999; Humbert & Hassoune 2005.

167 Germer-Durand 1897: no. 8; Avi-Yonah 1954: 74; pl. 9; Glucker 1987: 18-24.

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the fifth century, Gaza had become an internationally renowned centre of rhetoric and philosophy with close contacts with Alexandria, and the events that took place there in 402, just ten years after the destruction of the Serapeum, may have been influenced by those in the Egyptian metropolis.168 The historical evidence that we possess for its late antique history points to two phases in the process of Christianization: the first, in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, was characterized by conflict, whereas the second, in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, was characterized by appropriation of as well as reconciliation with the pagan past. This reconciliation is, for example, evident in the writings of (Christian) rhetors such as Choricius, who, amongst other things, defended mime, which otherwise had been a favourite target of Christian polemics.169

Gaza's main cultic centre was a temple dedicated to Marnas, the so-called Marneion.

The temple has not been archaeologically identified, but it may be that it is situated underneath the present site of the city's Great Mosque.170 It is perhaps depicted on

Gaza's coins, which show two cult images, a nude male deity and an Artemis dressed as

a huntress with a bow. The controversy surrounding this temple and its idols in the early fifth century lies at the heart of one of the key narratives of the destruction of idols in the Roman Near East. The source is the lively but equally problematic *Life of Porphyry*, authored by Mark the Deacon who had known Porphyry personally and claims to be

an eyewitness. Yet the text as it has come down to us is most likely to be an amalgam, perhaps dating to the middle of the fifth century, although some have argued that it

belongs to the sixth century.171 The text is extant in two versions, a Greek one and a shorter Georgian one that may have been based on a lost Syriac version. It is difficult to assess how much of the text was extrapolated later, and how much can be attributed

to Mark's original work, but given the overall persuasive picture of Gaza as well as its cults and topography that is presented in the text, there is little reason to disregard it as pure fiction.

Gaza is depicted in the late antique sources as a stronghold of paganism that was

openly hostile to its Christian population.172 This is clear already from the beginning of the account of Porphyry's stint as the city's bishop, which he took up in 394. On his journey to Gaza from Caesarea, Porphyry thus encountered pagan villages in episodes

that are strikingly similar to Shenoute's visits to villages in Upper Egypt (see Chapter 2), and this meeting of holy man and pagan population is thus a common theme in

many such texts. According to Mark, the villages were "given to the madness of idols,"

and their population "strewed all the roads with thorns and prickles, so that one could 168 Renaut 2007.

169 Mussies 1990b; Malineau 2005; Sivan 2008: 346.

170 Glucker 1987: 22. The topography of Gaza has not been well enough explored for us to be able to pinpoint the precise location of the Marneion. Coin evidence: Hill 1914: lxxiv–lxxviii; 146-147; pls. XV, 10-11; XVI, 6; XLI, 9.

171 Head 2001: 55 (C. Rapp). On the historical accuracy of this text, see Mussies 1990b: 2455-2457; Trombley 1995: I, 246-282; Rubin 1998.

172 On the Christianization of Gaza, see Van Dam 1985; Trombley 1995: I, 188-245; Geiger 1998.

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not pass by, and poured out filth, and made smoke of other evil-smelling things, so that we were choked by the stench and went in peril of being blinded."173 As noted, this

image of pagans conniving to sabotage the incoming bishop is again to be considered

as a literary convention of the genre, but may equally play off a historical situation in which there were pockets of pagan villages in the vicinity of Gaza that were violently opposed to the process of Christianization and attempts at conversion that may have

been implemented.

A large part of the *Life of Porphyry* is devoted to his year-long visit to the imperial court of Arcadius at Constantinople in 400, after he had had little initial success in converting the population of Gaza to Christianity. Porphyry tried to persuade the emperor to take action against the pagans at Gaza. Arcadius, however, did not want to upset the pagan

population for fear that his treasury might lose tribute and noted that Gaza "is well-

disposed in the matter of paying taxes, contributing much money."174 After prolonged

pressure and some clever manoeuvring courtesy of the empress Eudoxia, he ultimately

supported Porphyry's mission and ordered the closure of the temples and oracles of

Gaza.175 The events in Constantinople, large parts of which are narrated as dialogue,

are not supported by any outside evidence and surely represent a literary construction.

The empress was seemingly in the ninth month of pregnancy and through the prayers

of Porphyry and his cohort for her to give birth to a male heir, the Christian commu-

nity of Gaza was linked to the future of the empire and the later emperor Theodosius

II. Through the empress' desire to sponsor the construction of a large church in Gaza, she furthermore imitated Helena's patronage of churches in the Holy Land. Eudoxia's

involvement in Church policy and religious controversies in Constantinople is well

known from other sources, and it is entirely possible that she sponsored similar projects outside of the capital.176

When Porphyry returned to Gaza in 402, he wasted little time in confronting the

local idol-worshippers and the whole narrative is primed to emphasize his success in

eradicating idols.177 Recent converts from paganism soon told him about a statue of

Aphrodite, whose cult had traditionally been very important at Gaza. This statue was

regarded as having oracular powers that were particularly useful for marriage proposals and stood at a crossroads in the heart of the city:

173 κῶμαι τυγχάνουσιν παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν αἵτινες ὑπάρχουσι τῆς εἰδωλομανίας. Ἐκ συνθήματος

οὐν οἱ τούτων οἰκήτορες κατέστρωσαν πᾶσαν τὴν ὁδὸν ἀκάνθων καὶ σκολόπων, ὥς τινας

μὴ δύνασθαι παρελθεῖν, ἐξέχεαν δὲ καὶ βόρβορον καὶ ἐκάπνιζον ἄλλα δυσώδη, ὥστε ἡμᾶς ἐκ

τῆς δυσοσμίας πνίγεσθαι καὶ περὶ τὴν ὅρασιν κινδυνεύειν (Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 17.5-11, trans. Hill).

174 Οἶδα ὅτι ἡ πόλις … ἀλλ᾽εὐγνωμονεῖ περὶ τὴν εἰσφορὰν τῶν δημοσίων πολλὰ συντελοῦσα

(Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 41.4-6, trans. Hill).

175 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 41.

176 Holum 1982: 48-78.

177 See also Trombley 1995: I, 210.

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…in the place that is called the Four Ways (τετράμφοδον), there was a statue of marble which they said was a statue of Aphrodite; and it was set

above an altar

(ἐπάνω βωμοῦ λιθίνου), and the form of the statue was of a woman, naked, and

having all her shame uncovered. And all they of the city did honour to the statue,

especially the women, kindling lamps and burning incense. For they reported

concerning it that it gives answer in dreams unto those who wish to make trial of

marriage, but they deceived each other, speaking falsely. And oftentimes, being

bidden by the demon to make a contract of marriage, they were so unfortunate

that they came even to divorce, or lived together in evil wise.178

It is noteworthy here that the statue is flagged as an idol of worship by the presence of the altar and the practice of rituals as well as the fact that Aphrodite is represented in the nude.

Straight off the ship, Porphyry and his group of followers soon approached this

statue of Aphrodite with a cross – which served a similar function as that described in Demeas' inscription at Ephesus:

The demon that dwelt in the statue beholding and being unable to suffer the

sight of the sign which was being carried, came forth out of the marble with great

confusion and cast down the statue itself and broke it into many pieces. And it

fell out that two men of the idolators were standing beside the base on which

the statue stood, and when it fell, it clave the head of the one in twain, and of

the other it broke the shoulder and the wrist. For they were both standing and

mocking at the holy multitude.179

178 Ὡς δὲ εἰσήλθομεν εἰς τήν πόλιν περὶ τὸ καλούμενον τετράμφοδον, στήλη ἵστατο ἀπὸ μαρμάρου

ἣν ἔλεγον εἶναι Ἀφροδίτης· ἦν δὲ ἐπάνω βωμοῦ λιθίνου, ὑπῆρχεν δὲ τὸ ἐκτύπωμα τῆς στήλης

γυναικὸς γυμνῆς ἐχούσης ὅλα τὰ ἄσχημα αὐτης φαινόμενα. Ἐτίμων δὲ τήν στήλην πάντες

οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως, μάλιστα αἱ γυναῖκες λύχνους ἅπτουσαι καὶ λίβανον θυμιῶσαι. Ἐφήμιζον

γὰρ περὶ αὐτης ὅτι χρηματίζει κατ’ ὄναρ ταῖς βουλομέναις προσομιλῆσαι γάμῳ, ἠπάτων δὲ

ἀλλήλας ψευδόμεναι. Ἐπιτραπέντες δὲ παρὰ τοῦ δαίμονος, πολλάκις χάριν συναλλαγῆς γάμου, τοσοῦτον ἀπέτυχον ὥστε καὶ εἰς διαζύγια αὐτοὺς ἐλθεῖν ἢ κακῶς συνοικῆσαι (Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 59, trans. Hill, slightly modified). On this episode, see also (among the vast literature) Mango 1963: 56; Trombley 1995: I, 191; Sivan 2008: 333. Trombley’s claim that this statue stood by the Maiuma Gate seems unfounded. As noted by Grégoire and Kugener in their edition of the text, τετράμφοδον is not attested elsewhere, but is likely to refer to a τετράπυλον

which can be observed on the Madaba map.

179 ἑωρακὼς ὁ ἐνοικῶν δαίμων ἐν τῇ στήλῃ, μὴ φέρων ἰδεῖν τὸ φοβερὸν σημεῖον, ἐξελθὼν ἐκ τοῦ

μαρμάρου μετὰ ἀταξίας πολλῆς, ἔρριψεν αὐτὴν τὴν στήλην καὶ συνέκλασεν αὐτὴν εἰς πολλὰ

κλάσματα. Ἔτυχεν δὲ δύο ἄνδρας τῶν εἰδωλολάτρων παρίστασθαι τῷ βωμῷ ἐν ᾧ ἵστατο ἡ

στήλη, καὶ συμπεσοῦσα, τοῦ μὲν τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐδιχοτόμησεν, του δὲ τὸν ὦμον καὶ καρπὸν

κατέκλασεν· ἵστατο γὰρ ἀμφότεροι μυκτηρίζοντες τὸν ἅγιον λαόν (Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 61, trans. Hill, slightly modified). On the power of the cross in exorcism, see Kristensen 2012.

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Chapter 1

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The death of the pagans mirrors an account of the dangerous powers of statues in the *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*, where, however, it is Christians that perish. The fate of the statue is formulated in Biblical terms, by reference to the Second Book of Daniel:

“the gods of the heathen were dashed in pieces and become as dust that is scattered

from the summer threshing-floor.”180

As is the case in several Egyptian hagiographies (see Chapter 2), this incident of idol destruction at Gaza was also followed by mass conversion. *The Life of Porphyry* tells of how 32 men and seven women were converted to Christianity.181 But given the highly

rhetorical character of this account, there is every reason to be sceptical of the historicity of such exact numbers. The text was clearly designed to present a dramatic narrative

of the Christianization of Gaza and was therefore etiological by nature. Its audience

was clearly the later Christian communities of Gaza that sought an identifiable – and

even heroic – account of their origins. Such an account undoubtedly emphasized the

hardships that resulted from the confrontation with certain groups among the pagan

population. This is even explicitly acknowledged in the introduction to the *Life*.182

Ten days after the destruction of the statue of Aphrodite, the emperors's envoy Cyne-

gius (not to be confused with Maternus Cynegius, active during the reign of Theodosius I) arrived with his soldiers.183 Cynegius announced the imperial decree to close temples and overturn idols in the city. His announcement was followed by tumultuous riots by

pagans that were violently suppressed by Cynegius' troops. The *Life of Porphyry* then gives us an account of the city's public temples, eight in total.184 We are furthermore told that in Gaza, "there were also other very many idols in the houses and in the villages, whereof no man could reckon the number."185 These idols were subsequently destroyed

by Cynegius' soldiers, in the company of the city's Christian population.186 However,

their entry to the famous Marneion, whose downfall Jerome had prophesized, was

blocked by the pagan priests, who also hid the sanctuary's cult images. After another

ten days, Cynegius and his troops were finally successful in seizing and setting fire to the Marneion, which burnt for several days.187 Hereafter, a search for idols was conducted in the houses of the city, "for there were many idols in most of the courts."188

180 συνετρίβσαν οἱ θεοί τῶν ἔθνων καὶ ἐγένοντο ὡσεὶ κονιορτὸς διασκορπιζόμενος ἀπὸ ἄλωνος

θερινῆς (Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 62.7-9, trans. Hill), a reference to Dan. 2:35.

181 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 62.

182 Πόσας γὰρ πολέμων προσβολὰς ὁ τοιοῦτος ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ τῶν δι' ἐναντίας ἐδέξατο, πόσας

συσκευὰς καὶ μυκτηρισμοὺς ὑπέμεινεν (Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 2.23-25).

183 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 63, trans. Hill. See also Sivan 2008: 334.

184 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 64.

185 Ἦσαν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πλεῖστα εἴδωλα ἐν οἰκίαις καὶ ἐν ταῖς κώμαις, ἅτινα οὐδεὶς ἠδύνατο

καθυποβαλεῖν ἀριθμῷ (Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 64.10-11, trans. Hill).

186 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 65.

187 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 69-70.

188 Πολλὰ γὰρ ὑπῆρχεν εἴδωλα ἐν πλείσταις αὐλαῖς (Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 71.1-2, trans. Hill. Pagan sacred books (of "witchcraft" and

“mysteries of idol-madness”) were also found and subsequently burnt.

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Those that were found were either burnt or thrown into the latrines. This second round of idol destruction at Gaza was also followed by an episode of mass conversion, and

within a year, 300 inhabitants of Gaza were converted.189 The returning enumeration

of the number of converts after each episode serves almost like a chorus, highlighting Porphyry’s progress. Later, a cross-shaped basilica was constructed on the site of the Marneion, and all remains of its pagan past were actively purged. The construction of

the church, known as the Eudoxiana and possibly represented on the Madaba mosaic

map, progressed with miraculous speed.190 Thus, we have here a foundation story for

what came to be the Christian community’s main place of congregation.

Another way to assess the historicity of the textual sources is through archaeology.

Gaza is unfortunately poorly known to us through material remains, which makes it

difficult to contextualize Mark’s narrative. The rich ness of the region in Late Antiquity is evident from recent finds at nearby Jabaliyah that

included a sixth-century ecclesiastical complex with an almost 400 m2 mosaic floor decorated with depictions of both animals

and humans.191 The city's urban layout is best known from the Madaba mosaic map,

and even that piece of evidence is incomplete in the case of Gaza.192 In total, only three pieces of marble sculpture have been securely identified as originating from Gaza, and they are (not unsurprisingly) all poorly documented.193 The best known but still largely neglected piece is a colossal statue depicting Zeus (perhaps in the local guise of Marnas) that was found in 1879 at Tell el-'Ajjul, 6 km south of the modern city of Gaza, and

then moved the following year to the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (Fig. 1.16).194 It 189 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 74.

190 Avi-Yonah 1954: 74; pl. 9; Glucker 1987: 19-22.

191 Sadek et al. 1999: 48; 62-63; 66-67. Some of these figural representations were re-organized according to the peculiar, local fashion of iconoclasm that will be discussed in Chapter 3, "Christianization and Memory in the Late Antique Near East."

192 See Avi-Yonah 1954: 74-75; pl. 9 for discussion of the Madaba mosaic map's contribution to the topography of Gaza.

193 Fischer 1998: 151-153, cat. nos. 161-163. Two of these sculptural survivors from ancient Gaza can quickly be summarized, as they add little to the present study. The first is a head of a statuette of Aphrodite, today in the Israel Museum (Fischer 1998: 152, cat. no. 162). Without a known archaeological context, it cannot be connected with Porphyry's story of the destruction of an image of Aphrodite at Gaza or any other Christian response. The second sculpture, currently in the Rockefeller Museum in East Jerusalem, is an example of ambiguous late antique iconography (Fischer 1998: 153, cat. no. 163; Vermeule & Anderson 1981: 16; 17, fig. 34). It belongs to a type that is usually interpreted as the Good Shepherd, but may not have had specifically Christian connotations.

194 Conder 1882; Reinach 1897: 14; Mendel 1914: 352-354, cat. no. 611; Fischer 1998: 151-152, cat. no.

161. Excavations at Tell al-'Ajjul were undertaken in the 1930s by Flinders Petrie. For recent excavations at the site, refer to Sadek et al. 1999: 55-56. In his "notes from Constantinople," Captain Conder informed readers that the statue had been saved by a missionary who prevented the locals who "had at once commenced to break up the statue, and had succeeded in greatly damaging the face" (1882: 147). He also commented on the mutilation of the statue that appeared to him to pre-date its discovery, its broken arm and legs ("appears to have been sawn off") (p. 148). Petrie, **82**

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Statue of Zeus Marnas, from

Fig. 1.16.

Gaza, now in the Istanbul

Archaeological Museum (photo:

author, by permission of the

museum).

is usually regarded as a work of the second century. Zeus/Marnas is depicted as sitting on a throne and with drapery around his waist and over his right shoulder.195 Both arms of the statue are missing. Shortly after its discovery, C. R. Conder suggested that the statue originated in the city of Gaza and had been moved to the *tell* by pagans in order to protect it from a fate similar to that of the previously discussed image of Aphrodite.

He furthermore suggested that the statue's current mutilated state was caused by an at-who identified the statue as Serapis, in fact noted its findspot as Tell es Sanam, "a small mound of Roman age, on the south side of the wady, near the coast" (1931: 2). Morhange et al. 2005 reports this mound as now mostly leveled for agriculture. Petrie also reported that the "sand-dune region between the Tell and the coast is largely covered with Byzantine and early Arab pottery" (1931: 1).

195 The statue breaks off below the waist, which is easily explained by the fact that it was produced in two separate pieces. This mode of production is very common for this statue type, refer to Maderna 1988: Taf. 12, cat. nos. JT 12, JT 11. For examples of how the lower part of the statue would have appeared, refer to ibid.: Taf. 8-9, cat. nos. JT 14, JT 25, JT 24.

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tempt to facilitate its transport in Antiquity.196 Could it have been one of those images that were hidden by pagans before the Christians attacked the

Marneion, as described

by Mark? This seems rather unlikely, and Carol Glucker has rightly pointed out that

the removal of such a colossal statue through the streets of Gaza would certainly have alarmed the Christian authorities.197 In spite of this, the Zeus/Marnas from Gaza is a remarkable statue, not least because of its large size and find location. Taking its size into consideration, the statue could well have been a cult image originally displayed

in a temple. Although speculative, it is a plausible suggestion that the statue originates from a sanctuary (of Marnas?) on the *tell* itself, where Petrie indeed reported Roman finds during his excavations.198 This *tell* also shares similarities with the area where the Eudoxiana was constructed, considering that it is depicted as being in the southwestern part of the city and situated on a hilltop, according to the Madaba mosaic map.199 It

is unfortunate that the statue was found so early that we possess little knowledge of

its archaeological context. If more was known, it would perhaps be possible to clarify whether this particular statue in fact represents the famous Marnas of Gaza as well as where and how it was originally displayed, and whether it had been embroiled in late

antique religious conflict.

As we have seen, Christian violence towards pagan images (as least as they can be

followed from one particular text) was intricately linked to the ambitions of Porphyry in the early fifth century, as previously shown by Johannes Hah n, and Mark’s literary construction of him as a founding figure in the Christian community of Gaza.200 The

violent responses to statues of Aphrodite and Marnas were thus embedded in political,

social, and religious rhetorical fields that require careful untangling.

Mark's narrative was explicitly constructed to eulogize Porphyry and to shine a heroic light on his efforts to convert the pagan population. Among his achievements are several miraculous events, including a rain miracle, that were followed by conversion; as such, the text presents a foundation story for the Christian community.201 The terminology

used to describe pagan sculpture is highly conventional (the inhabitants of pagan village outside Gaza are in several cases polemically referred to as εἰδωλομανίας, idol-maniacs).

Yet in spite of these conventional and rhetorical aspects, the story is very likely to have historical substance, since we know that the careers of bishops in the eastern Mediterranean in the early fifth century were built on their ability to confront and convert the pagan communities within their territories, and idol temples played a key antagonistic role in these efforts. There is no reason to believe that religious conflicts could not have taken place in Gaza in 402, only ten years after the destruction of the Serapeum

196 Conder 1882: 148.

197 Glucker 1987: 67, n. 131.

198 Petrie 1931: 2.

199 Avi-Yonah 1954: 74 notes that "[t]he situation of this basilica corresponds to that of the tell of ancient Gaza south-west of the present city."

200 Hah n 2004: 193-222.

201 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry,* 20-21.

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in Alexandria. It is also clear that at the same time that Porphyry was active in Gaza, Augustine was facing similar issues of idolatry among his community at Carthage (see

below). Unfortunately the archaeology does not allow us to see to what extent there

were alternative discourses at play and offers only few possibilities at present to help identify a broader spectrum of Christian responses. Although it applies a number of

topoi and rhetorical devices, the *Life of Porphyry* can offer insights into the different agents at play in the versatile environment of late antique religious change, including bishops, soldiers, and the imperial court, although this evidence must be used with

caution and placed within its larger context.

Why Did Christians Destroy Pagan Sculpture?

Textual sources provide us with a range of explanations as to why Christians in Late

Antiquity would mutilate, destroy, or in other ways respond physically to pagan sculp-

ture. While Biblical condemnations of idolatry in some ways may appear as the most

obvious motives behind such attacks, numerous other factors were at work, and I will

here introduce some of these. Many motives must have been intertwined and they can

as such be difficult to separate from each other.

The background to the majority of the narratives of iconoclasm is undoubtedly

the construction of Christian hegemony. With texts being the closest thing to a mass

medium that the early Church possessed, iconoclastic episodes established the religious authority of bishops and saints, as we saw in the above discussion of Gaza.202 The

destruction of pagan idols firmly embedded itself as a triumphal motif in everything

from ecclesiastical histories to Coptic pilgrims' chants. Pilgrims visiting Hermopolis in Egypt chanted: "And those shameful things, / demons and idols / and defiled things

made with hands / in the land of the Egyptians, / our good Saviour trampled down /

all together / and set up in their place / a holy pillar."203 The triumphal motive is also very clear in the case of the destruction of the Serapeum of Alexandria, which acquired international fame and may have inspired further acts of violence in other regions (see Chapter 2).

Conversion is one of the main motives behind acts of iconoclasm that can be observed

in the textual sources, as was noted in the above discussion of the *Life of Porphyry*. This motive in some cases provides a powerful narrative in which confrontation between

pagans and Christians is avoided, or at least downplayed, as it is often the converted pagans themselves that break their own idols (or so, at least, the

triumphant Christian sources lead us to believe).204 Jerome, for example, in a letter dated to the early fifth 202 Beatrice Caseau has commented on how "[e]pisodes of temple destruction or idol-smashing became an expected element in male saints' careers" (1999: 33).

203 Quoted from MacCoull 1998: 411. See also Chapter 2, "Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Alexandria," for Zachariah Scholasticus' description of chanting in the context of the Christian destruction of idols.

204 As it is the case, e.g., in *The Suffering and Miracles of the Martyr St. Julian*, 6, see Van Dam 1993: 168.

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century gives an account of a converted city prefect of Rome, Furius Maecius Gracchus, who destroyed a group of Mithraic images in 376-377.205 The power of the conversion

motive lies in its emphasis on the religious identity of communities. For example, in

Theodoret's writings it is entire tribes of Arabs that come to St. Simeon the Stylite to be converted after having destroyed their own idols.206 In a case from rural Egypt in the fourth century, the hermit Abramios destroyed idols and altars and was duly punished

for his actions. However, when he had been tortured for three years, the local com-

munity converted in awe of his dedication to the cause.207 In the *Doctrine of Addai*, an account of the Christianization of Edessa, the conversion of the entire city is linked to the day that the pagan priests overthrew altars dedicated to Nebo and Bel, having been persuaded by Addai's sermon to

convert to Christianity.208 Such narratives form strong communal bonds and bring a newly converted community together by giving them

a shared history. Often they demonstrate a certain obsession with numbers, be it the

number of idols destroyed or of people converted to Christianity (as we also saw in the case of Gaza). In one account of Joh n Chrysostom's conversion of the Ephesians in the city's theatre, we are told that 39,205 souls were baptized in one gigantic ceremony.209

This large group of newly baptized Christians later proceeded to tear down and burn

all of the idols of Artemis in her temple.

Linked to conversion, but more confrontational, are episodes in which idols are de-

stroyed in advance of church or monastic foundations, such as in the case of the Gaza

Marneion. This response effectively served as a form of ritual purification of sacred

spaces and landscapes.210 One of the most famous instances is Montecassino, where

Benedict destroyed a pagan altar and a statue of Apollo in 529, before founding his

monastery.211 But even in this case, the destruction took place with the cooperation of the local pagans who reportedly had been converted by Benedict's rhetorical skills. In another incident that reputedly dates to the time of Constantine but was not recorded

in writing until the sixth century, the scheme is the same, but the order reversed. Joh n, bishop of Antioch from 512 to 519, first consecrated a

church and then went to a pagan 205 Jer. *Ep.* 107, dated to 403, and see Coates-Stephens 2007: 173-174.

206 Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 26, and see Kaegi 1966: 262.

207 *Acta SS. Abramii et Mariae* 6-12, and see Saradi 2008: 115.

208 Drijvers 1982: 38-39, and see *The Doctrine of Addai*, ed. Phillips, p. 32-33.

209 Wright 1968: 42 (*The History of Joh n, the Son of Zebedee, the Apostle and Evangelist*); Foss 1979: 35.

210 Having founded the Montecassino monastery, “St. Benedict was not content with merely pulling down the idols and destroying the groves on the mountain; he also preached in the neighbouring country, and gave himself no rest until he had uprooted the last remnant of heathenism in those parts” (*The Life and Times of St. Benedict*, 136, trans. Lech ner). In this case St. Benedict ensured not only a ritually cleansed, Christian landscape, but also an economic supply chain; the chapter that gives this account concludes with an account of the land possessions and powerful privileges of the monastery.

211 *Life and Times of St. Benedict*, 135-136, ed. Lech ner.

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temple where he set a statue of Zeus ablaze.212 Many of these episodes where the destruction of idols took place in advance of the construction of churches are attested

quite late for our purposes (seventh century and later) and may very well be historical fabrications or belong a to a specifically Christian genre of

foundation myths, as was also noted in the case of the *Life of Porphyry*.213

The destruction of idols as part of rituals of exorcism is a special feature of hagiographies. This response was fuelled by what David Frankfurter has termed the "progressive

'demonization' of local spirits – that the typical village might have felt an increased sense of danger in the landscape."214 *Daimones* were intricately linked to idols in many Christian sources, and the evil demon is a powerful theme in literary polemics against paganism.215 In 434, a bishop named Quodvultdeus exorcised a girl who had been possessed by a demon in a bathhouse, indicating the liminal role of such establishments in Christian thinking.216 The vitality of these beliefs, quite independent of other Christian attitudes towards images, is furthermore demonstrated in the eighth-century *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, that famously warns its readers to "…take care when you look at old statues, especially pagan ones."217 Overcoming iconophobia thus became an occupation of early Christian society at large, and destroying images was seen as one way to accomplish this, although in some episodes, such as another involving Benedict at

Montecassino, it is made clear that the demonic power of images was in reality noth-

ing but mind tricks.218 By destroying idols, and the demons that dwelled within them,

saints and other holy men could restore the sacred order that had been destabilized by demonic presences. Such an attitude was also expressed in the Demeas inscription at

Ephesus.

Evidence from the Council of Elvira in 303 suggests that the destruction of pagan

idols was one way of achieving Christian martyrdom.219 Lives of martyrs thus sometimes dwell on the vanity of idolatry and list pagan statues, leading up to a climactic scene of 212 “And after the dedication the holy bishop Joh n went into the temple with the king, and with all the multitude of the city, and they overthrew it, and burnt the statue of Zeus with fire. And the demon who dwelt in the idol cried out, saying, ‘Thou art afflicting me exceedingly, O Joh n,

[for] thou hast turned me out of my dwelling’” (Severus of Antioch, *Discourse on the Compassion of God*, fol. 34a, ed. *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, 756).

213 See further examples in Knögel 1936; Greenhalgh 1989: 204-205.

214 Frankfurter 1998: 279. See also Merrifield 1987: 83-84; Caseau 1999: 35-36. On demonology in temples, see Bayliss 2004: 59-61.

215 See also Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5.21. On the links between statues and magic, see Greenhalgh 1989: 208-210.

216 Lepelley 1994: 5; Stirling 2005: 158. On bathhouses as liminal places, see Chapter 3, “Liminal Places and Christian Response at Scythopolis.”

217 ταῖς ἀρκαίαις στήλαις καὶ μάλιστα ταῖς Ἑλληνικαῖς πρόσεχε θεωρῶν (*Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, 28, trans. Cameron & Herrin). On the *Parastaseis* and its view of pagan monuments, see James 1996.

218 *The Life and Times of St Benedict*, 141.

219 Rothaus 2000: 109, n. 13, *contra* Thornton 1986 on this issue.

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iconoclasm, only to be followed by a usually very detailed description of the agonizing death of the iconoclastic protagonist (or at least threat thereof). Some of these lists are almost obsessive in their compilation of pagan divinities and this is suggestive of their performative function.220

Even after Constantine, achieving martyrdom can be identified as a motive for Chris-

tian destruction of pagan images (or, in the case of Mar Rabbula at Baalbek, attempts

thereof).221 The theme takes its most powerful shape in accounts of Christians who

achieved martyrdom during the reign of Julian (361-363).222 His prominence in the

sources is unsurprising, given the efforts of later times to denounce his memory. His

"wickedness" provided the perfect background to introduce the motives of divine pun-

ishment and justice. Joh n Chrysostom recounts in dramatic detail the circumstances

surrounding the fire on 22 October 362 in which the sanctuary of Apollo at Daph ne,

including its famous chryselephantine cult statue, was destroyed.223 For Chrysostom, the fire represented an act of divine justice, as Julian had removed the grave of St. Babylas from the sanctuary. Julian nonetheless prosecuted Christians for the fire. There is also preserved in the *Suda* the absurdly tragic story of three Christians in Phrygia, who were punished for having destroyed the statues of the local temple:

They endured many hardships and punishments on account of this and were set

upon grills and punished by fire. They showed their valour then by saying: "Ama-

chios, if you want to get a taste of roast meat, turn us over on our other sides lest

we seem to you half-roasted to the taste." And thus they died.224

The cruelty of pagans who attacked Christian iconoclasts often reaches such levels of

surreal absurdity, in a similar fashion to earlier accounts of pre-Constantinian martyrs.

Theodoret tells us, for instance, that at Baalbek the deacon Cyril who had destroyed

numerous idols was eaten by a pagan crowd.225 Such narratives are most informative

of later Christian constructions of martyrdom, but tell us little about how episodes of idol destruction or mutilation took place in the fourth through sixth centuries. They

belong to a particular genre of Christian rhetorical spectacle.

220 One unique (unfortunately fragmentary) example has survived in Coptic, but is assumed to have been a translation, see Crum 1913: 83-85, no. 22.

221 *The Heroic Deeds of Mar Rabbula*, trans. Doran, 74-75. See Doran's edition 52-53 on Rabbula's attitudes towards pagans and temples, and the introduction to this edition for a summary of Rabbula's life and tenure as bishop of Edessa from around 411-412 to 435-436. For a fuller treatment of Rabbula's life and theology, refer to Blum 1969, and esp. 30-32 on the Baalbek episode.

222 Julian referred to these as the acts of "evil and stupid men" (quoted from Rothaus 2000: 109).

On Julian more generally, see Athanassiadi 1992.

223 “For, having beseeched God to release fire onto the temple, he burned down the entire roof, and after demolishing the idol to the soles of its feet and rendering it to ashes and dust, left all the walls standing” (Joh n Chrysostom, *Discourse on Blessed Babylas*, 93).

224 Suda, s.v. Ἀμάχιος, quoted from Suda OnLine, corrected for one typo.

225 Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 3.7.

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In this section I have focused on Christian responses as they can be observed through the textual sources. These sources need to be used with caution, given their highly

rhetorical character and the fact that they frequently rely on literary topoi. In spite of the ridicule and religious critique of idol worship, late antique Christian responses to pagan statuary were frequently ambiguous, incorporating dismissive as well as curatorial attitudes. As we saw in the Introduction, the poet Prudentius was perfectly capable of balancing these two views within different texts. New archaeological and epigraphical

research has provided significant nuance to this picture, and this will be explored further throughout this book in order to understand the full spectrum of Christian responses

to pagan sculpture in different contexts, as well as their underlying motives.

Interpreting Response: Selective Destruction as a Framework

How can archaeology contribute to our understanding of Christian responses to pagan

images in Late Antiquity? This section aims to answer that question by outlining the

most important interpretive framework proposed in this book, which attempts to il-

luminate the meanings and motives behind destructive and transformative responses

through archaeological evidence. This approach focuses on the phenomenon of selective

destruction, that is, the targeting not only of particular images but also specific parts of images, and the variety of meanings that this response could have in Christian contexts.

Any archaeological discussion of Christian destruction, mutilation, and transforma-

tion of pagan sculpture needs first to confront the issue of chronology, which provides a major challenge to the study of responses in any period. Dating when a head or an

arm was severed from its statue body is indeed one of the most pressing methodological issues that faces the archaeological study of Christian responses to pagan sculpture. In many cases where destruction or mutilation has been identified by the excavators, they provide only broad dates, such as “the fourth century” or “the early Christian period”, which can only be of limited use in constructing a historical narrative.226 Sometimes, the excavators provide more specific dates but do not fully publish the finds on which they base their chronologies. These dates are frequently based on the excavators’ subscrip-tion to the impact of the Theodosian Code across the empire, but as we saw above, the

legislation on idolatry cannot have caused widespread destruction, and it is therefore less useful as a chronological guideline. In rare cases, coins have provided more substantial dating evidence, and such numismatic evidence can give us a less circumstantial chronology. At Messene, for example, the thorough destruction of a colossal cult image of Hercules of the Caserta type, found in the small sanctuary he shared with Hermes

near the gymnasium, is dated to the Theodosian period by means of coins that were

found among the marble fragments.227 A few comparable cases of well-dated destruc-

tion of statuary will be discussed in subsequent chapters. However, some general dating criteria are difficult to define, and it remains necessary to discuss this important issue 226 See, e.g., Caputo 1998: 252 describing a stratum that dates to the fourth century containing beheaded statues from a sanctuary of Isis at Cumae.

227 Themelis 1995: 79-83, pin. 34-35; 2001: 19; 2003: 101-102; Deligiannikis 2005: 404.

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on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the individual circumstances of each find.

Full-scale and thorough destruction of pagan images is attested in a number of cases,

as is amply shown by Sauer and other scholars: for example, the two mithraea at Doliche in Commagene and the sculptures from the sanctuary

of Serapis at Sarsina that survive in thousands of fragments.228 In the Maison Carrée in Nîmes, a statue of Venus was found

in no less than 103 fragments; in the case of a recently excavated augusteum at Eretria, Christian destruction of “an almost obsessive manner,” smashing the sculptural inventory of at least seven statues into hundreds of pieces, was observed by the excavators.229

The sculpted base of the cult statue of Nemesis at Rhamnous furthermore constitutes a

jigsaw puzzle for the conservators, as it was found in a multitude of small fragments.230

However, targeted attacks on specific parts of images reveal further aspects of visual practices as well as the nature of Christian response. Already Rodolfo Lanciani, the

great 19th-century topographer of Rome, noted the targeting of heads, noses, and paws

of Sphinxes in the destruction of the Iseum in the Campus Martius.231 In other cases,

such as the reliefs from the Agora Gate at Aphrodisias, it was specifically the heads of divinities that were targeted. In the same city’s Sebasteion, scenes of pagan sacrifice and representations of particularly offensive divinities such as Aphrodite were singled out, as were the genitals of most nude figures.232 As I hope to show, this evidence for selective destruction enables a closer reading of the individual rites of destruction and therefore constitutes a useful interpretive framework for this study.233

One source for understanding the meaning that selective destruction could have to

contemporary viewers is a sermon by the church father Augustine, presented to his local community at Carthage on 16 June 401.234 This was a time when all pagan temples, at

least in theory, had been closed and the worship of idols officially outlawed. It is clear from the sermon, however, that Augustine's congregation had seen pagans still visiting 228 First on Sauer's list of indications of Christian iconoclasm is "exceptionally laborious and thorough modes of destruction without any obvious practical purpose like re-use of stone" (2003: 38). On Sarsina, see Sauer 2003: 139-141; Hornbostel 1973: Taf. 68. On Doliche, see Schütte-Maischatz

& Winter 2000; 2001; 2004; Winter 2000.

229 Quotation from Schmid 2001: 140. Nîmes: Mâle 1950: 44.

230 Pétracos 1981.

231 Lanciani 1988: 138 (in a report dated to 21 July 1883), and see comments by Coates-Stephens 2007: 174, n. 8.

232 Agora Gate: Linant de Bellefonds 2009: 5. Sebasteion: Smith 2012.

233 On rites of destruction, see also Stewart 2003: 272-278. Selective destruction is also discussed in Caseau 2001: 112-116; and in the context of the 16th-century religious violence in France, see Davis 1973. For other applications of "selective destruction" as a framework for understanding acts of iconoclasm, see Nylander 1988 (while focusing on the Near East, Nylander also interprets the Tetrarchs outside San Marco in Venice as having been subjected to selective mutilation, given that the imperial *fibulae* and noses are missing); Bahrani 1995 (Near East); Varner 2005 (decapitation and *damnatio memoriae*); Graves 2008 (16th- and 17th-century England).

234 August. *Serm.* 24.6. On this episode, see also Brown 1967: 231; MacMullen 1997: 51; Riggs 2006: 298-300.

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temples and participating in idol worship. Enraged by this, they intended to take action, and to follow the examples of bishops in the eastern Mediterranean who had led

high-profile campaigns against paganism and destroyed the cult statues of many famous

temples.

In his sermon, Augustine did not follow the example of his peers but instead gave an

interesting anecdote of what he saw as a recent Christian success in the battle against paganism. This story concerns the fate of a bronze statue of Hercules that stood in a

temple at Carthage. The statue had recently been re-gilded, indicating its continued

reverence in the community, when a new and less tolerant Christian proconsul arrived

in town.

The proconsul's response offers a different perspective on the city's religious transformation. Choosing not to remove the statue from the temple, or to have it destroyed in

an iconoclastic spectacle, he simply removed the gilding of the statue. Augustine's spin on this story is that in removing the gilding, Hercules' beard was shaved off, resulting in the loss of his religious identity and authority. He concludes that:

Hercules wanted his beard gilded. But obviously I misspoke, saying Hercules

wanted it to be, because he couldn't; for what can mindless stone (*insensatus*

lapis) wish for? In truth he wanted nothing, he could do nothing. But the people who wanted him gilded blushed at his being shaved…Brethren, I deem it more

shameful for Hercules to have his beard shaved than to have his head taken off.235

According to Augustine, who here plays with some of the usual topoi of Christian anti-

idol rhetoric, the removal of the gilding of Hercules' beard thus equalled the public

exposure and subsequent humiliation of this pagan image, as one of the most powerful

signifiers in his iconography had been forcefully removed.

Augustine's sermon may be taken as testimony to the volatile religious environment

of early fifth-century North Africa, and there could also have been a pecuniary motive in removing the gilding of the statue, but we may equally see it as an example of an

attempt to negotiate the power of images through a targeted attack on a specific body

part. In terms of visual practices, the story illustrates the existence of a conceptual hierarchy of potency in relation to specific body parts when it comes to divine images. The removal of a very specific part of the body, in this case Hercules' beard, disempowered the image and in consequence the god became harmless to the population of Carthage:

no longer a powerful idol, but an image of ridicule. We can imagine that the particular iconographies and attributes of other divinities could have

had a similar significance to Hercules' beard – and were treated as such in other acts of Christian response.

235 "Hic autem etiam barba inaurata esse uoluit. Quando iam tibi non est, hic etiam deaurata barba esse uoluit. Erraui plane, quia dixi, esse uoluit. Quid enim uult insensatus lapis? Ille uero nihil uoluit, nihil potuit. Sed qui deaurari eum uoluerunt, de raso erubuerunt…Fratres, puto ignomini-osius fuisse Herculi barbam radi, quam caput praecidi" (August. *Serm.* 24.6, translation quoted from MacMullen 1997: 51).

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The statue of Hercules itself could be left in the temple in this powerless state seemingly without offending Christian sensitivities. The episode is interesting in that it constitutes a carefully orchestrated attack on a very specific part of an image that in turn reveals something about how the bodies of the gods were perceived by contemporary

viewers. It is, for example, noteworthy that a Syriac account of Joh n Chrysostom's arrival in Ephesus during the festival of Artemis mentions the painted and gilded surfaces of

an idol of the goddess that is displayed above all of the city gates.236 It may also hint at a deeper significance of the gilding (and polychromy more generally) in constructing

the divine. The bronze statuette that was so carefully buried in the Syrian sanctuary on the Janiculum was similarly gilded, as is the image of Bacchus from the same sanctuary; several gilded cult reliefs are known, including the spectacular example from the mithraeum underneath S. Stefano Rotondo (Fig. 1.8).237 Although we find gilding of

sculpture in private contexts and on sarcophagi, it may well have had connotations of

the religious sphere, similar to the use of other sacred objects and iconographies in so many examples of Roman domestic and funerary decor.

A similar case to the removal of Hercules's beard seems to be testified to in the 25th Sermon of Proclus, who was patriarch of Constantinople in the mid-fifth century. The

sermon survives only in a Latin translation and eulogizes Joh n Chrysostom, who had

been Proclus' friend and mentor: "Every place he freed from error. In Ephesus he un-

dressed the art of Midas." This final phrase has been regarded as a mistake on behalf of the copyist, who apparently read *artem Midae* rather than *Artemida* (for Artemis).238 This could then be a reference to Joh n's closing of the Ephesian Artemision. As was pointed out by Gerard Mussies, this could be a poetic way of saying that Joh n has removed the garments and jewelry that would have adorned the cult statue of Artemis and given its

special ritual significance.239 For Joh n Chrysostom, or possibly his later peers, taking these important cult objects from the cult image equalled the annihilation of its power as an idol. The adornment of jewellery and pieces of clothing was indeed among the

rituals that singled out cult images from other statuary. Joh n's actions thus constituted an inversion of the pagan ritual in which the cult statue would have received such garments.240

Can we identify the underlying assumptions of visual practices that lay behind the

responses that we see in Carthage and Ephesus? It may be a truism to suggest that

embodiment lies at the heart of representational culture. After all, bodies in stone

not only share a form with real bodies, but are also referred to in the same language.

We refer to the eyes of a statue, to its feet, and so on, by the very same terms that

236 Wright 1968: 9 (*The History of Joh n, the Son of Zebedee, the Apostle and Evangelist*); Foss 1979: 35.

237 S. Stefano Rotondo: Lissi-Caronna 1986: tav. VII–XIV.

238 *PG* 65, p. 832; quoted from Mussies 1990a: 194. The passage continues “in Phrygia he made the so-called Mother of the Gods without sons,” referring to Joh n Chrysostom’s successful campaign to convert the Phrygians. The language here may be poetic, rather than referring to specific acts.

239 Mussies 1990a: 194.

240 Steiner 2001: 109; Mylonopoulos 2010b: 6.

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Portrait of Germanicus, British

Fig. 1.17.

Museum (photo: author).

we would use when describing the human body. An immediate form of familiarity

will thus always link anthropomorphic bodies in stone with those of flesh and blood.

However, the degree of this immediacy and the kind of responses that it inspires rely

heavily on a given society's traditions of visual culture and especially the role of images in its religious practices. It is for exactly that reason that I devoted the first half of this chapter to Roman visual practices in relation to the making of divine images. In the late antique context the paradoxical nature of images as being like human bodies is directly addressed in Psalms 135, which stresses that idols "have mouths, but they speak not /

eyes have they, but they see not / they have ears, but they hear not / neither is there any breath in their mouths."241 Yet here it will be argued that Christians responded to pagan images as if they possessed exactly those qualities of the body and the senses.

In effect, Christian destruction of pagan images reflected a reversal of existing visual practices that juxtaposed flesh and blood bodies with images in stone.

The archaeological evidence for the Christian destruction of pagan images adds con-

siderably to the discourse of image negation. This can be seen by considering a green

basalt bust of Germanicus dating to the reign of Tiberius and now in the British Museum 241 Ps. 135: 15-18, quoted from the Authorized Version.

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(Fig. 1.17).242 The portrait is not a divine image per se, even if Germanicus' popularity meant he received almost godlike honours after his death in 19, but the relatively rare material from which it was made and its highly polished surface may have set it apart

from other, more ordinary-looking sculptures. The bust, whose military dress highlights Germanicus' leadership of the army, originally may have been part of the sculptural

ensemble of an imperial cult shrine or perhaps stood in some other prominent public

setting. It is very difficult to know whether the Christians would have identified the portrait as being of Germanicus, another member of the Julio-Augustan dynasty or,

simply as a generic imperial figure.

The portrait has a secondary carving of a square cross on its forehead which links it

to a relatively small group of sculptures that were also treated in this way during Late Antiquity as a method of Christian appropriation.243 Some scholars have suggested

that the carving of these crosses was akin to the ceremony of baptism, thus blurring

treatments of bodies and images.244 But what is of further interest in the context of

the present argument, where we can be sure of the Christian agency involved, is the

treatment of other parts of the head that stand out immediately on this otherwise very smooth and well-preserved sculpture. This treatment can be characterized as an example of selective destruction. Firstly, the nose has been removed by at least two carefully placed blows. This is suggestive of an attempt to deny the image an embodied state by

preventing it from breathing, even if the mouth has not been hit. A comparative case

is an Apollo from Salamis that has also specifically had its nose targeted while the rest of the sculpture was left intact, except for the genitalia that have also been removed (Fig. 1.18).245 Secondly, the bust shows clear signs of an attempted decapitation, as a line of saw marks are visible across the neck of this very hard stone. The act of decapitation can be seen as juxtaposing this stone body with its flesh and blood counterparts, perhaps as a mirror practice of corporal punishment, a possibility that is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Lastly, Germanicus' right ear lobe appears to have been cut off in a straight line. The mutilation of the ear is interesting for several reasons. A passage in the *Abodah Zarah* states that the nullification of an idol can be achieved by cutting off "the tip of its ear, the tip of its nose, the tip of its finger."246 The relatively subtle act of removing part of the ear of an idol was thus ascribed special significance in the negation of the image's power, as the mutilation of just a small part of the image came to stand for the loss of

242 British Museum, inv. Sculpture 1883; Kristensen 2012: cat. no. A10. It was presented to the museum by the Reverend Greville J. Chester in 1872 and has no archaeological context.

243 The group is discussed and catalogued in Kristensen 2012. Franz Joseph Dölger dated the cross on the Germanicus portrait (identified in his publications as Drusus) to the middle of the fourth century in Dölger 1930: 280-284.

244 For this interpretation, see Langmann 1985; Hjort 1993.

245 On this Apollo, see Karageorghis & Vermeule 1964: 11-12, cat. no. 3; Hannestad 2001.

246 *Abodah Zarah*, 4.5.I B, tr. Neusner. I am grateful to Lea Stirling for first noticing the mutilation of Germanicus' ear. The possible connections between Jewish tradition and Christian destruction of pagan images are also discussed by Trombley 2008.

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Statue of Apollo from Salamis

Fig. 1.18.

(photo: Georgios Deligiannakis,

by permission of the Depart-

ment of Antiquities, Cyprus).

its power and religious authority, similar to the case of Hercules at Carthage. Jewish thinking on the negation of idols may have inspired Christian response, although it is difficult to establish the level of any such influence.247 In the context of earlier Egyptian practices, the treatment of the so-called reserve heads from Giza may shed some

additional light on the Egyptian origins of such representational practices. On a large number of these limestone heads, found in funerary contexts dating to the Fourth Dy-247 See also Trombley 2008: 156-157.

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nasty in the third millennium B.C., the ears have been systematically mutilated.248 The interpretation of this earlier practice is controversial, but it would seem to be connected to a way of linking a particular embodied and sensual quality to the ears as well as the fate of the body in the afterlife.249 If we see the Christian mutilation of the Germanicus bust (described as “random” in the British Museum’s online catalogue) as parallel to

these earlier practices, the mutilation of Germanicus’ ear thus could be suggestive of a practice that either negated the image’s hearing ability in the afterlife, or, if we see the carving of the cross on the forehead as a positive act (a form of baptism), perhaps even protected it from the call of demonic spirits now that it had been converted to

the Christian faith.250

These examples of archaeology and text thus suggest that the treatment of individual

body parts belonged to a discourse of response that was of great importance to how

Christians in Late Antiquity conceptualized the power of images. Marking the forehead

with a cross at the same time that the nose and ears were mutilated implies an ambivalent response to the portrait of Germanicus, but the forms that these responses took all are consistent with a notion of embodied images that is explored further in the following

chapter. Regardless of the specific readings of these mutilations (and it is certainly not unproblematic to equate Jewish and Christian practices, or to connect early Christian

responses with Fourth Dynasty funerary traditions), the careful targeting of specific

body parts as read through textual and archaeological sources is testimony to a response that was linked to the embodied qualities of a stone image. The targeting of ears may

have been a response that was limited to Egypt, a region with its own peculiar set of

visual practices (see Chapter 2). Yet in other regions of the Mediterranean, the concept that gods would listen to their worshippers could be represented through votives that

248 Tefnin 1991: 29-39; 85-87. These were placed in tombs as ‘replacements’ for the heads of those interred in tombs. Occasionally, parts of these heads were found to have been mutilated. Such acts of selective destruction would thus have had a positive meaning, as they sought to protect the owner of the tomb from evil spirits. In his study of this group, László Kákosy noted that “[t]he ears of some of them are

deliberately cut off probably in order to make them deaf to the words of the demons or the enemies of the deceased" (1999: 16-17). A contrasting meaning is found among the Coffin Texts, which state that "[t]o render an enemy harmless, eyes, fingers, staffs, teeth, oars, knives, shields and even potter's wheels are broken" (quoted from Ritner 1993:149).

The ritual breakage of objects is well-attested among grave goods from Dynastic periods, see Ritner 1993: 148-153.

249 A group of second/third-century gemstones (two examples are in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, see Henig, Whiting, & Scarisbrick 1994: 176-177, cat. nos. 384-385) are suggestive of a similar Roman interest in the significance of the ears in commemorative practices. They depict a hand tweaking an ear (detached from the head) and the label "remember." I thank Martin Henig for pointing these out to me. Roman votive reliefs also occasionally show single or multiple ears detached from the head. On Egyptian conceptions of the body in the afterlife, see also Chapter 2, "Images and Bodies in Egyptian Culture."

250 The British Museum's online catalog entry on the Germanicus portrait can be found at:

www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/gr/b/basalt_bust_of_germanicus.

aspx (last accessed 30 May 2012).

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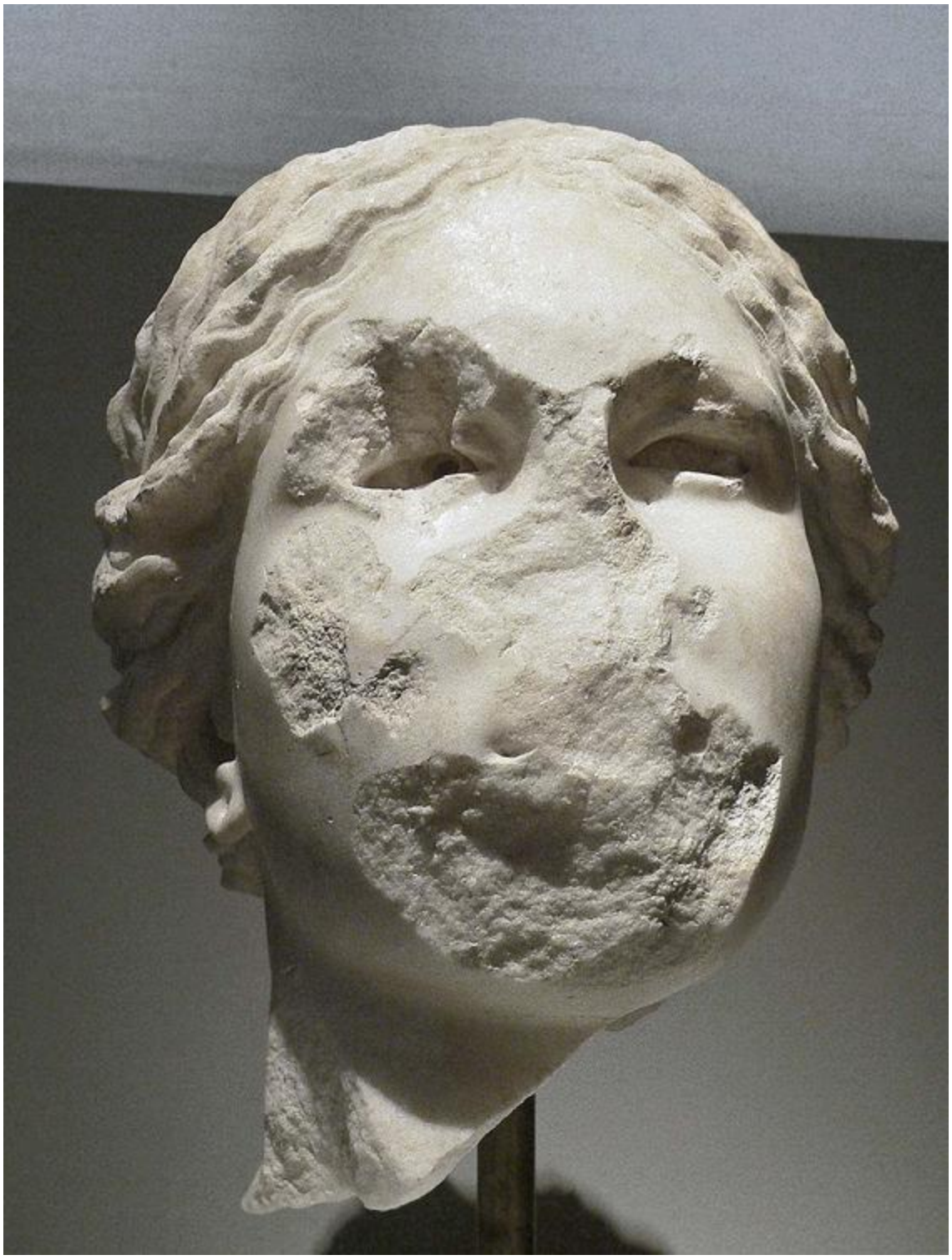

Praxitelean head of a goddess,

Fig. 1.19.

now in the Acropolis Museum,

Athens, inv. Acr 1352 (photo:

author, by permission of the

museum).

depicted ears, occasionally accompanied by inscriptions that emphasize the auditory

aspect of the divine experience.251 This could perhaps suggest that the mutilation of the ears was perceived to negate such powers.

Many other forms of selective destruction can be identified as having had a more

universal meaning and widespread prevalence. Eyes in particular, as the most vivid

part of an image, have been targeted in acts of iconoclasm throughout history.252 There are many intriguing examples of this response in the late antique context, including

a Praxitelean head of a goddess recently discovered in Athens (Fig. 1.19).253 The head is larger than life size, which indicates that it may have belonged to a cult statue. The eyes have not only been targeted, but gouged out, as they were made of a different

251 For example, in the case of bronze plaques depicting ears from the Pergamene Asklepieion, discussed in Petsalis-Diomidis 2005: 215-217.

252 Freedberg 1989: 415, noting that the eyes "are the clearest and most obvious indications of the vitality of the represented figure."

253 Athens, I Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Archaeology, inv. NMA 200. The head was found in Makriyianni Street during construction of the new Acropolis Museum. See also a colossal head of Antoninus Pius in Naples: Pozzi 1989: pl. 50.

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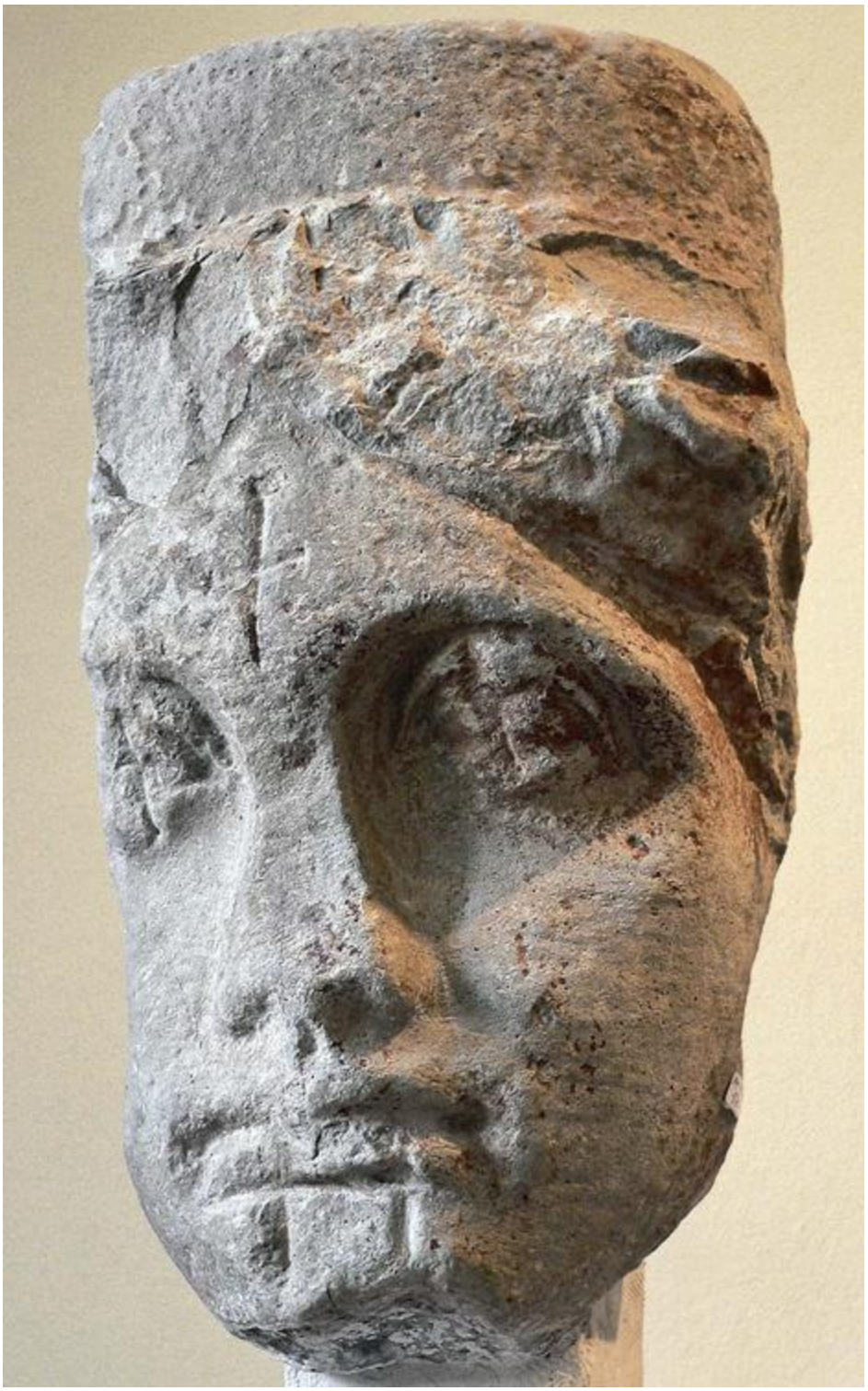

Fig. 1.20. *Colossal head of goddess, Sparta Archaeological Museum (photo: author, by permission of the*

Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious

Affairs, Culture and Sports / Archaeological

Receipts Fund).

material from the rest of the head, which was marble. This is again testimony to a

belief in the potency of the eyes in creating divine presence, an issue that I shall return to in Chapter 2 in relation to Egyptian relief sculpture. The complete removal of the

eyes in this case effectively negated the powers that they had in the creation of divine presence. Other extensive damage to the chin, mouth and nose can also be observed

on this head.

Another case of selective destruction is found on a colossal head of Hera, now housed

in the Sparta Museum (Fig. 1.20).254 Due to its size, it is very likely to have been part of a cult statue, but we unfortunately possess very little information about the archaeological context in which it was found. The head has been inscribed with five crosses, one on the forehead, one across each eye and two across the mouth. The position of these crosses

is not random. Two of the five crosses that have been carved on this image are placed

across each eye, again suggestive of the importance of the eyes in divine representation.

By targeting its eyes and mouth, the perpetrators negated three of the statue's perceived abilities: seeing, speaking, and breathing. The nose furthermore appears to have been

scraped off, as if to completely prevent the statue from breathing in a similar fashion to the portrait of Germanicus.

254 Tod & Wace 1968: 190, cat. no. 571; Kristensen 2012: cat. no. A18.

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Relief dedicated to Pan and the Nymphs, 1st EPCA – Ancient Agora Museum, Athens (photo: **Fig. 1.21.**

author, by permission of the Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports / Archaeological Receipts Fund).

Heads have also always been a particular focus of iconoclastic activity, a fact that was powerfully confirmed in Iraq with the fall of Saddam Hussein and the destruction of his colossal portraits. It has previously been noted that the mutilation and decapitation of heads was a focus of Christian destruction, for example, in Athens, Aphrodisias, Arles, and several cases in Egypt (Fig. 1.21).255 A number of further instances can easily be found. We saw already in the case of Germanicus one potential meaning that this kind

of response could have. In another case from Cosa, a statue of Bacchus was decapitated and only the body left behind in the temple (Fig. 1.22).256 A group of reliefs from the *scaenae frons* of the Hierapolis theatre also demonstrate a tendency to focus on the head.

255 Athens relief (Agora Museum inv. I 7154): Frantz 1988: 90. At Aphrodisias, a series of philosopher *tondi* portraits were found decapitated, see Smith 1990. On the focus on heads in the Egyptian context, see Sauer 2003: 95. The heads of images were also singled out during the Byzantine iconoclastic controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries, see, for example, Grabar 1957: figs.

1, 85. At Arles, a statue of Venus was decapitated and mutilated, see Mâle 1950: 43.

256 Collins-Clinton 1977: 5-7; 49-50, cat. no. 1.

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Fig. 1.22. *Statue of Bacchus from*

the shrine of Liber Pater,

Cosa Antiquarium, inv. no.

C68.25 (photo courtesy of

Dr. Jacquelyn Collins-Clinton).

In one scene, the head of a female worshipper of Artemis has been hacked away.257 In

another, the head and genitalia of Apollo have been mutilated, and the face of a second figure has been removed (Fig. 1.23). The excavators of the sanctuary of Isis at Cumae have furthermore noted that several of their sculptural finds had clearly been beheaded.258

Yet the potential meanings of this treatment of statue bodies have traditionally not

received much attention, nor has this focus on the head been contextualized against

other evidence. This form of response finds a precedent in the Old Testament, where

God attacks the idol Dagon by cutting off both his head and his hands, diminishing

257 D'Andria & Ritti 1985. Female worshipper: Relief IV l of the so-called Artemis cycle (ibid. *:* 158-165). Apollo: Relief II b of the so-called Apollo cycle (ibid.: 35-41). Another relief from the same cycle shows an Apollo whose face appears to have targeted as well (relief II d, ibid. *:* 45-48

and tav. 15,2). The reliefs were excavated between 1972 and 1979.

258 Caputo 2009: 246-247.

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Defaced relief from the theatre at Hierapolis (photo courtesy of the Deutsches Archäologisches **Fig. 1.23.**

Institut Istanbul, Neg. Nr. R 4410, A. Peschlow).

him to a powerless stump.259 Yet the most obvious reason why the head is targeted in

acts of iconoclasm is its bodily properties. The face is an immediate point of contact between two individual bodies, and furthermore it is frequently

regarded as imbuing

individuals with an identity as well as the abilities of seeing, speaking, breathing, etc.260

In a range of cultural taxonomies of the body, the head is additionally regarded as the most important body part as the chief signifier of the individual.261 Decapitation both in art and as a social practice has accordingly been the focus of a number of recent

archaeological studies that aim to interpret its cultural and social meanings.262

259 I Sam. 5:4; as illustrated by a scene in the Dura-Europos synagogue (panel WB 4), see Kraeling 1956: pl. LVI. On Biblical “reference points” in destruction, see also Graves 2008: 39.

260 Varner 2004: 3-4; 2005.

261 Talaley 2004: 157.

262 Talaley 2004; Varner 2005; Meskell 2008; Kristensen forthcoming b.

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Occasionally it can be observed that specific parts of a head were targeted. In several of the above cases, it is clear that the nose of a statue has been mutilated or removed, for example, in the case of the Apollo from Salamis (Fig. 1.18), the Praxitelean head

from Athens (Fig. 1.19), and the colossal head from Sparta (Fig. 1.20). The statue of

Athena from Palmyra that will be discussed further in Chapter 3 is another instance of this practice, as is a well-known head of a goddess from the Roman Agora at Athens.263

Why was the nose targeted in these cases? First of all, it plays a role in terms of bodily functions, but it also appears to have taken a special place in Roman legal practice, at least of the popular variety. Both Vergil and Martial make references to the shearing of the nose as an especially cruel form of punishment for adultery. In the *Aeneid*, Menelaus punishes the Trojan Deiphobus for his adultery with Helena by cutting off his nose,

hands, and ear.264 Martial makes an even more explicit comparison between the nose

and a certain other body part:

Who persuaded you to cut off the adulterer's nose? No offence against you has

been committed by this part, my good husband. Idiot, what have you done? Your

wife has lost nothing, since your Deiphobus' cock is safe and sound.265

Martial's comparison can also be observed in medieval acts of violence, when the nose

was similarly seen as a suitable part of the body to punish in connection with adultery.266

In several cases discussed by Groebner, men wanted to punish their wives by cutting off their noses. There is a suggestive connection here between the nose and sexual norms. The shearing of the nose was linked to castration, in both legal and popular perspectives.267

This puts an interesting spin on the fact that the statue of Apollo from Salamis, apart from missing his nose, also had its genitals removed (Fig.

1.18). The act of cutting off the nose thus had dual meanings in both Roman and medieval contexts, referring not only

to the function of the nose in relation to breathing, but also to bodily punishment and castration. Both meanings, however, presuppose a juxtaposition of statues and bodies

when it comes to acts of violence and visual practices more generally.

The group of statuary from the Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at Cyrene

demonstrates how selective destruction can be identified as a particular Christian re-

sponse on a large scale and across an entire site.268 The excavators from the University of Pennsylvania Museum recovered 264 statuettes and fragments of over 100 statues.

263 Kristensen 2012: cat. no. A12, with further bibliography.

264 Verg. *Aen.* 6.497.

265 “Quis tibi persuasit naris abscidere moecho? / non hac peccatum est parte, marite, tibi. / stulte, quid egisti? nihil hic tua perdidit uxor, / cum sit salva tui mentula Deiphobi” (Mart. *Epigr.* 3.85, trans. Shackleton Bailey).

266 Groebner 2004: 68-77.

267 Groebner 2004: 73.

268 White 1984; White & Monge 1992; White 2006. On the archaeological context, see esp. White 1984: 104-109.

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Marble head of female statuette from the sanctuary of

Fig. 1.24.

Demeter and Persephone, Cyrene (now reported as sto-
len), showing mutilation of nose and mouth (after White
& Monge 1992: Fig. 10).

Life-size marble portrait from the sanctuary of

Fig. 1.25.

Demeter and Persephone, Cyrene (now reported as
stolen), showing mutilation of eyes, nose and mouth
(after White & Monge 1992: Fig. 12).

Life-size marble portrait from the sanctuary of Demeter

Fig. 1.26.

and Persephone, Cyrene, showing mutilation of eyes and
nose (after White & Monge 1992: Fig. 13).

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Much of the damage to these can be attributed to an earthquake dated to 365, and even though the sanctuary was more or less deserted from the third century onwards,

the excavators were able to identify a wave of Christian destruction that probably took place in the late fourth century. In all cases, heads and bodies had been separated from each other and they were often found in different parts of the sanctuary.269 18 of the 54

recovered heads of statues had been subjected to selective destruction that specifically targeted eyes, nose, and mouth, as is evident from the three examples depicted here

(Figs. 1.24-26).270

As Donald White observes in his discussion of this material, these parts of the body

appear to have been chosen to render them useless “as organs of sight, speech and

taste.”271 We may interpret these mutilations as forms of ‘ritual killing’ that blur the distinction between organic bodies and stone bodies. Because they *are* bodies in the eyes of the attackers, these images could be harmed and killed in similar ways to human bodies. This large and well-excavated corpus of material from the Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at Cyrene demonstrates this understanding of images on a massive scale

and is supplemented by further evidence from the same city that comes with less precise archaeological documentation.272 One particularly

striking example is a high-quality

Pentelic marble statue of an athlete whose nose has been completely eradicated; the rest of the body is relatively unscathed, although it was found in fragments (Fig. 1.27).273

The mutilation of the body – whether organic or stone – can be linked to a broad

range of issues, including bodily practices, demonology, and ritual conquest.274 Interpreting Christian response through the lens of selective destruction, the targeting of specific parts of the body, thus reveals a wide range of social practices and attitudes towards the body in late antique society. The challenge is to interpret what the different Christian responses signify in particular contexts, something that will be attempted throughout this book. It must be recognized that the method has numerous interpretive pitfalls, not least due to problems of chronology and the complex afterlife of the sculpture that is under study here. For instance, heads and limbs were in many cases

cut off sculptures in the round for the purpose of making them much easier to reuse as architectural blocks; selective destruction is thus often easier to prove in the case of relief sculpture. However, when applied carefully with close attention to the archaeological

evidence, it can be very useful to understand both the range of Christian responses to pagan images in Late Antiquity and the motives behind them. In much of the material

269 White & Monge 1992: 77; White 2006: 196.

270 White 2006: 196-197. Ten of the 18 heads were found among earthquake debris; eight were found in surface layers. As White points out, statuary in both levels could have been mutilated by Christians (White & Monge 1992: 80).

271 White 2006: 197.

272 See, for example, Paribeni 1959: 48, cat. no. 81; 80, cat. no. 187; 81, cat. no. 189.

273 Paribeni 1959: 152-154, cat. no. 445.

274 See also Groebner 2004. On the significance of the mutilation of hands, see Cracco Ruggini 1998, esp. 385.

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Pentelic marble statue of a nude **Fig. 1.27.**

man from Cyrene (after Paribeni

1959: Tav. 192).

that is discussed in the following chapters, the targeting of specific body parts is very clear. Selective destruction will be especially important as an interpretive framework in Chapter 2, which discusses Christian responses in Egypt.

This chapter has laid out the historical and methodological framework that is applied

in what follows. One of the main strengths of the archaeological evidence for Christian response in Late Antiquity is that it gives significant nuance to the picture of wanton destruction that is often painted by the textual sources. The main problem with the

archaeology, on the other hand, is that of dating damage and then in turn ascribing this to Christian agency. Additionally, the textual sources seemingly give us a suitable cast of iconoclasts – bishops, monks, mobs, and occasionally emperors – whereas the agents

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of response in the archaeological record are more elusive and always remain nameless (except in a few, very rare cases). This chapter has attempted to outline ways in which Christian destruction of pagan images can be interpreted as more than the mindless

result of religious intolerance or blind hatred that previous scholarship has sometimes taken it to be, especially when starting from the perspective of visual practices. The spectrum of Christian responses constitutes, as observed by Frankfurter in the context of Egypt, “an extensive vocabulary of destructive acts all distinctly meaningful to the actors’ senses of

identity and social change."275 The following chapters will explore this vocabulary in further detail.

275 Frankfurter 1998: 278.

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CHAPTER 2

The Semantics of Christian Response: Pagan Sculpture in the Sacred Spaces of Egypt

After prolonged tensions between the city's pagan and Christian populations, in 392 the Serapeum of Alexandria became the stage of one of the most notorious episodes of late antique religious violence.1 A Christian mob entered the world-renowned pagan temple and destroyed the cult image that stood within its *naos*. This episode, as well as the brutal murder of the philosopher Hypatia in 415, has contributed significantly to a view of Egypt as prone to particularly violent forms of Christianization and late antique religious conflict. The image of the triumphant bishop Theophilus standing on

top of the Alexandrian Serapeum, as he appears on a fragment of the so-called Papyrus

Golenišcev, has accordingly been reproduced in numerous publications to support this

point (Fig. 1.15). Recent studies have illuminated the very specific circumstances in

which social order broke down in Alexandria in Late Antiquity, and it is clear that this view of Egypt as a hotbed of religious violence is deeply influenced by the rhetoric of the sources, primarily Christian historians with axes to grind.2 Nonetheless, the view has been widely accepted by archaeologists.3

This chapter reviews the historical and archaeological evidence for Christian re-

sponses to pagan images in Egypt with special emphasis on their treatment in sacred

spaces (*i.e.* temples and sanctuaries). The basis for the discussion is a selection of sites in different parts of the country where it is possible to consider the local contexts

closely (Fig. 2.1). It will become clear that Egyptian Christianity incorporated a very wide range of responses to pagan images that need to be understood within a very

long-lived tradition of visual practices. I argue that the incorporation of these responses and visual practices into the narrative of the Christianization of Egypt will provide

1

In what follows, I do not pretend to be consistent in naming conventions for particular sites, as I will usually give the most commonly used name for a site as well as its Greek-Roman name if applicable.

2 Haas 1997; Hah n 2004: 15-120; Watts 2010.

3

Sauer’s study of “religious hatred” across the late antique Mediterranean devotes three chapters to the Christian destruction of images in Egypt (2003: 89-113), although his focus is on one particular site, Dendara, where the responses may not have been typical for the country at large.

The Semantics of Christian Response

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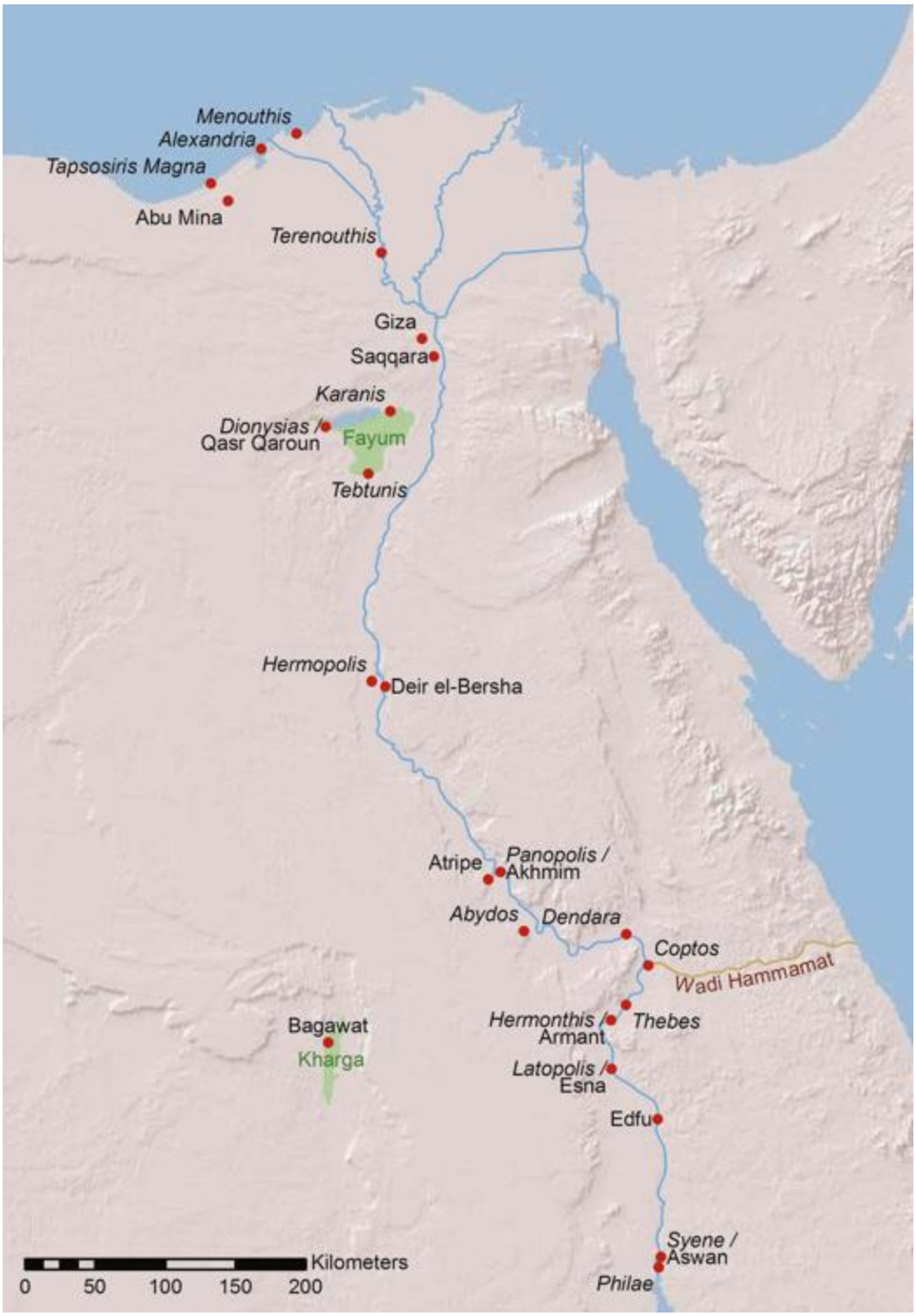

Fig. 2.1. *Map of Egyptian sites discussed in Chapter 2 (by Eva Mortensen).*

a much fuller picture that may also be relevant to the study of other regions. After

some introductory remarks on how to approach the Egyptian evidence, which requires

some clarification to fully contextualise within the wider range of topics explored in **108**

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the previous chapter, and a discussion of the sculptural landscape of Roman Egypt, I turn to the evidence for Christian responses to pagan images in the metropolis of

Alexandria (which from its very beginning was situated on the margins of Egyptian

culture) and its immediate hinterland. The challenge in this case (as in many others)

is to juxtapose a strongly biased Christian literary tradition with a fragmented and

often poorly documented archaeological record which nonetheless provides some

important material for the wider understanding of the motivations behind particular

Christian responses. I then move south to the Nile Valley to look at how Christians

approached the substantial physical remains of pagan temples that have survived

remarkably intact up to the present day. In the chapter's final section, I turn to the evidence for continuity of local visual practices through consideration of the meanings of the selective destruction of images in Egypt, building on the interpretive framework that was proposed in Chapter 1.

Approaching Egypt

Christian responses to images in late antique Egypt have occasionally been noted by

studies of 'temple conversion,' but scholarship specifically dedicated to the issue has only recently begun to appear.4 The majority of studies deal exclusively with the written sources, for example, Walter Kaegi's study of the 'twilight' of Egyptian paganism.5 Sauer's study of "religious hatred" in Late Antiquity explicitly discusses the issue of Christian destruction of images in Egyptian temples, but his methodology is problematic for

reasons already discussed at some length.6 It is much more fruitful to see the Christian responses in Egypt in terms of continuity of local practices, something that Penelope

Wilson attempted in her work on the 'negation' of images in Egypt which she places

in a long-term, regional perspective from the Dynastic period to Late Antiquity.7 An

important point that arises from her study that is in line with the approach taken here is the realization that "there are positive effects too from negating names and images."8

Of special importance too is the most recent work by Frankfurter on the vitality of

images in late antique Egypt.9 As discussed in Chapter 1, this continued perception of images as both powerful and meaningful was in many cases what necessitated physical

response, and Frankfurter looks at the connected practices of making and breaking

images in the context of the religious transformation of late antique Egypt. But both

here and in most other recent work, the problem remains that of connecting Christian

4 On ‘temple conversion’ in Egypt, see most recently the critical overview of Dijkstra 2008: 86-94

(with extensive bibliography and reviewed by Kristensen 2011b); 2011; as well as contributions in Hah n, Emmel, & Gotter 2008.

5 Kaegi 1966.

6 Sauer 2003: 89-113.

7 Wilson 2005.

8 Wilson 2005: 130.

9 Frankfurter 2008a; 2008b.

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destruction to specific cases of mutilated images among the large *corpora* of Egyptian relief sculpture and statuary.10

The study of Christian response is complicated by the afterlife of many Egyptian

temples and monuments. First of all, there is the issue of temple abandonment to con-

sider. When were specific temples abandoned, and what kinds of activities could have

taken place there after the priesthood had left? We know that some sanctuaries were

simply covered over by sand, and the changing floor levels that can be identified give some indication of chronology. At other sites, reliefs would have been covered by later construction, for example, at Medinet Habu where a community of town-dwellers had

emerged since at least the Ptolemaic period, if not earlier. Buildings could also be altered in simple ways that effectively erased the pagan images there, for example by hanging

drapery over the walls or sealing off rooms. This common practice often results in the complete preservation of a room's relief decoration. Several of the temples under study here have furthermore never been underground, which means that we are faced with

many methodological difficulties, particularly in relation to establishing a relatively secure chronology of when specific images were damaged. Considering the country's long

history of usurpation and religious change, some cases of destruction can be securely

dated to the Pharaonic period.11 Other traditions in relation to sacred images that may appear destructive also have a very long history and remain difficult to pinpoint in time.

At the other end of the scale, there is the problem that Egyptian monuments have

been vulnerable to vandalism for several centuries since Late Antiquity. Some monu-

ments may theoretically have been targeted during Byzantine Iconoclasm.12 Islamic waves of iconoclasm are reported to have affected Egypt in the 13th and 14th centuries.13 The nose of the Sphinx on the Giza Plateau may have been removed at this time, perhaps

indicating the persistence of ideas of image negation. This is interesting in relation to my earlier comments on selective destruction and important to the later discussion of

embodied images and the longevity of this phenomenon in Egypt, but it also poses

further problems of chronology. In general, the responses to ancient monuments during

the Islamic period have been largely overlooked by researchers, although recent work

has generally downplayed the extent of the destruction.14

10 This is specifically acknowledged by Frankfurter: “I am less interested in documentation of particular historical figures than in the range of iconoclastic acts *remembered* as meaningful in Egyptian Christian tradition” (2008b: 135f).

11 For an overview of alterations and destructions of images throughout Egyptian history, see Brand 2000: 23-26.

12 A number of Coptic artefacts with no known provenience show intriguing patterns of mutilation that may be attributed to Byzantine Iconoclasm, e.g. a sixth-/seventh-century lintel, now in Berlin, on which the heads of two angels have been entirely defaced (Falck 1996: 136, cat. no.

96; Enss 2005: 106, cat. no. 11, Taf. 15).

13 Reid 2002: 30. For example, the faces of two wooden consoles from the Monastery of Apollo at Bawit appear to have been mutilated, see Enss 2005: 114-115, cat. nos. 32-33, Taf. 30.

14 On Islamic views of the ancient Egyptian past, see also El Daly 2003; 2005. The title of the latter book is *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium*, demonstrating the extent of this neglect. On the **110**

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Egypt was never immune to the kinds of pragmatic yet destructive use of ancient monuments that we see in most other regions of the Mediterranean. In the 19th century, many sites suffered from the expansion of urban centres and a boom in industrial growth.15 Ancient monuments were believed to house hidden treasures and were feared

by locals, inspiring a variety of responses. In his classic eth nography of Egypt in the 1830s, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, Edward William Lane thus recounted the superstitions of local Egyptians in relation to tombs and temples that they believed were inhabited by *ifrins* (spirits).16 Such beliefs led to feel-ings of fear and alterity, but also in other cases to more destructive responses.17 Amelia Edwards noted in her Egyptian travelogue *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* how sculptures were being defaced at the time of her travels between 1871 and 1874.18 Between her

visits, Edwards was able to see the swift decay of wall-paintings and monuments over a relatively brief period of time. All of these causes, and undoubtedly many others, may have contributed to the physical state of the monuments and sculpture that we see

today.19 I will return to these important questions of chronology and agency in more

detail later in this chapter when discussing specific sites and monuments.

Before continuing with this discussion, some remarks on the sorts of images that

were visible and used in the social and religious life of late antique Egypt are required.

Textual descriptions of cult statues testify to the fact that they were made of precious materials, such as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and turquoise.20 These highly valuable (and reusable) cult statues rarely survive, but we are in several cases familiar with their settings in temples. They were kept in the innermost and most protected part of the

sanctuary, enshrined in wooden or stone *naoi* that survive in relatively large numbers Arab conquest, see Sijpesteijn 2007a; 2007b. The recent work that has been done suggests that the impact of the Arab conquest in the seventh century on pagan monuments was much less destructive than was assumed in the past, for example in the case of the Library of Alexandria (Lewis 2008). The Arab conquest and the transition to Islam did not transform Egyptian society overnight, although it did introduce a new set of attitudes towards images that is beyond the scope of this study. On Islamic attitudes to images, refer to Grabar 1987: 72-98.

15 O'Leary 1938: 56; Reid 2002: 55-57.

16 Lane 1954 [1895]: 236. On superstitions among the fellahin of Upper Egypt, refer to Blackman 1968: 218-226.

17 See the remarks by Francis Griffith on the "recent" defacement of a *stela* of Amenhotep III in a quarry at Deir el-Bersha (1895: 64) and also noting destruction of tombs at Beni Hassan, Sheikh Saïd, and other sites. Parts of the Amenhotep III *stela* was already mutilated during the Amarna period, according to the website of the Leuven Deir el-Bersha Project, demonstrating the complexity of the afterlife of many Egyptian monuments: www.dayralbarsha.com (last accessed 10

June 2009).

18 Edwards 1888 [1876]: 353.

19 O’Leary 1938 also considered some of these problems of chronology and concluded that “[a]

llowance must be made for these natural causes and accidents, but there still remain a number of cases which we may fairly regard as due to Christian activity during the IVth and Vth centuries”

(56).

20 Robins 2005: 4. On the cosmic associations of these materials, see ibid.: 6.

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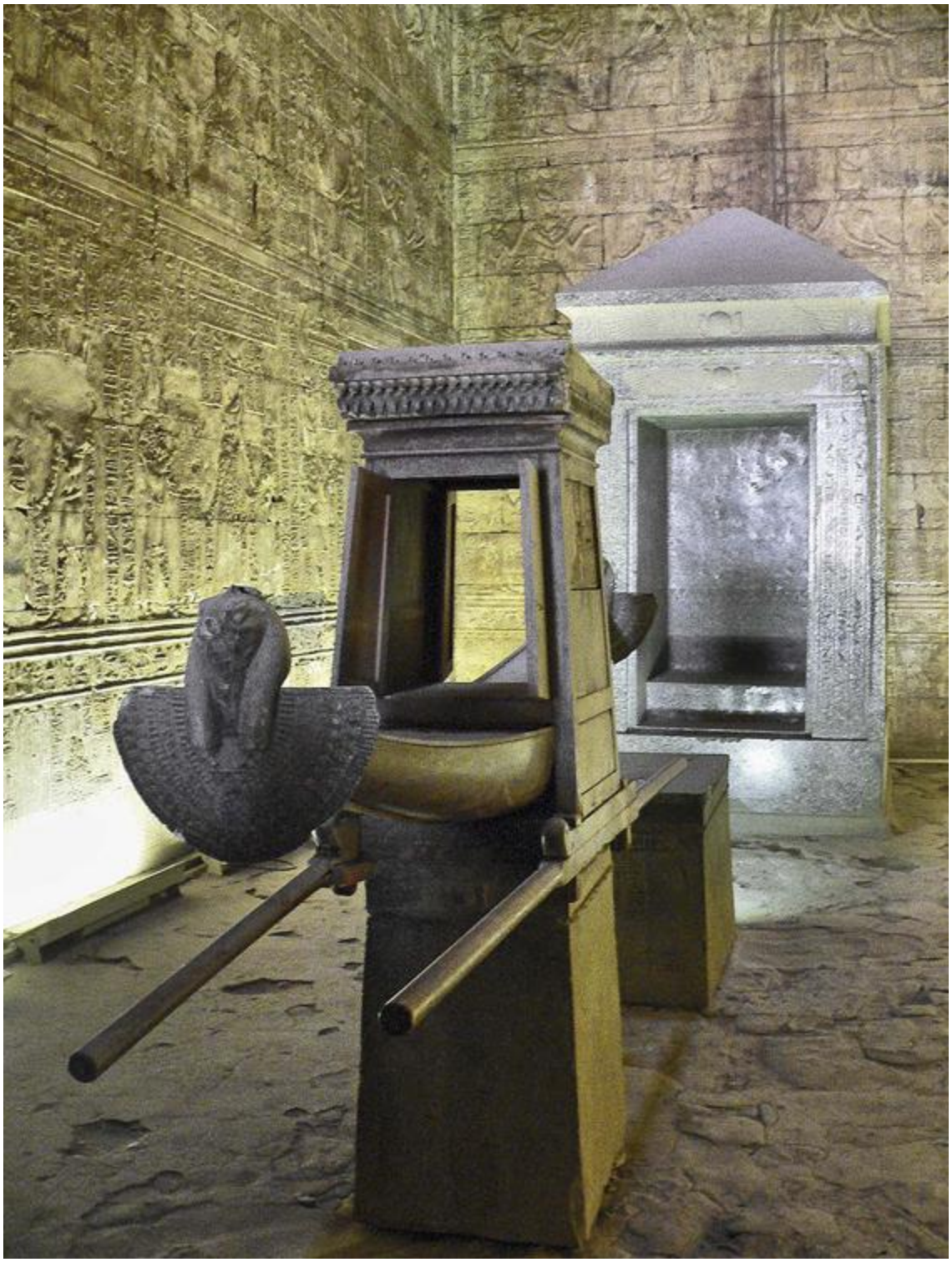

Fig. 2.2. Naos *and barge for cult statue*

in the Edfu temple (photo:

author).

(Fig. 2.2).21 The intricate Daily Ritual that took place in relation to cult images has a long pre-Roman history, known from the practice that began during the New Kingdom

of representing it on temple walls.22 Surviving papyri give very detailed accounts of the Daily Ritual that include both the clothing and the preparation of food for cult images.

This ritual cycle (at sunrise, midday, and sunset) and the strictly limited access for only a select group of priests were all-important to the maintenance of cult and social order.

Miniature jewellery intended for adorning cult images is also known from Dynastic and

Hellenistic Egypt.23 The placing of such additions on the images may have served to

activate certain powers perceived to dwell within them, which corresponds with what

21 For the collection of *naoi* in Cairo, refer to Roeder 1914. On Egyptian cult images, refer to Hornung 1982: 135-142; Traunecker 1991; Meeks & Favard-Meeks 1997: 53-80; Lorton 1999; Wilkinson 2000: 62-63; Assmann 2001: 40-47; Meskell 2004: 87-116; Robins 2001: 31-33; 2005; Hill 2007.

22 From this evidence, we are intimately familiar with the daily activities of individual temples, such as, for example, Edfu (Alliot 1949) and Abydos (David 1981). On the Daily Ritual more generally, see Moret 1902; Lorton 1999: 131-145.

23 Hill 2007: 157-158; 165-166 discusses a ‘Macedonian-early Ptolemaic’ miniature broad collar for a cult image.

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was said about the Artemis at Ephesus and other cult statues in Chapter 1. Other activities included washing the statue and chanting. This treatment points to the perception of cult images as embodying the divinity and their function as living images.

Egyptian texts of the Greco-Roman period frequently evoke the power of images

in temples. *Sekhem* literally meant “power” or “symbol of power” but could also be used to denote “image”, clearly implying the powerful properties of images in cultic

practices.24 There was similarly a strong sense of the unity of divinity and representation in the concept of ‘indwelling’, meaning that the divinity would install itself in its cult image through rituals that were similar to the death ritual of the Opening of the Mouth. This is described, for example, at Dendara: “After his *ba* came from the sky to see his monuments, / his heart united with his cult images.”25 Through the notion of

indwelling, cult statues became a locus of interaction between the divine and human

worshippers. This explains their strictly controlled environment within sanctuaries and the highly ritualized methods of handling them. The power inherent in statues is also

evoked by Hermetic texts that were widespread during Late Antiquity.26

To account for the variety of Egyptian images in religious practices, the Egyptologist Claude Traunecker has made a formal categorization of divine representations, which

is useful for thinking about how images were perceived by worshippers.27 The category

of “images d’action” includes representations that were inhabited by the divine *ba* and as such were the most prized possession of any temple.28 Within this category, two

subcategories have been suggested by Traunecker: images related to “culte manifesté,”

such as the main cult image in its *naos* and images with special cultic functions such as those used in processions, and images related to “culte latent,” which could be stored in crypts where their presence generated symbolic power. This generation of power

through images also explains the assemblages of statuary that were accumulated over time within sanctuaries. A second main category of images, “images d’évocation,” includes

the decoration of temple walls, which often shows rituals and myths.

The perceived powers of images gave rise to phenomena such as ritual burial, occa-

sionally in so-called temple caches, in which numerous sacred objects were deliberately deposited together. Most famous among these is undoubtedly the extraordinarily rich

Karnak cache that was explored between 1903 and 1905 by Georges Legrain.29 The

24 Assmann 2001: 42.

25 Quoted from Assmann 2001: 43.

26 For example, the following third century example highlights the oracular, dangerous, and healing powers of statues: “[S]tatues…are ensouled and conscious, filled with spirit and doing great deeds; statues foreknow the future and predict it by lots, by prophecy, by dreams and by

many other means; statues make people ill and cure them, bringing them pain and pleasure as each deserves" (*Asclepius* 24, slightly modified from the trans. of Copenhaver, quoted from Frankfurter 2008b: 140).

27 Traunecker 1991; and see the discussion of Hill 2007: 156-157.

28 Traunecker 1991: 85-86.

29 Legrain 1905; 1906; Porter & Moss 1972: 136-166; Wilkinson 2000: 64; Blyth 2006: 231-233. The Karnak Cachette was not fully excavated, due to ground water infiltration of the trenches. A The Semantics of Christian Response

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cache, found in its eponymous court, included over 750 pieces of stone sculpture and some 17,000 bronzes that had been buried in two separate pits as deep as 14 m.

Greek-style statuary and coins of Alexander were found among the cache, suggesting

a last date of deposition sometime in the Ptolemaic period. While not all of these

thousands of images can be given the label of 'cult statue', they clearly benefited from a kind of sacred halo effect, due to their placement in a sanctuary and proximity to

the main cult statues. A smaller cache, consisting of 26 statues and deposited in the

early fourth century, was located in the Solar Court of Amenhotep III in the Luxor

Temple in 1989.30 Many images from these caches of sculpture are extraordinarily

well-preserved, demonstrating the care that temple officials took in depositing them

in an orderly fashion, but there is also evidence to suggest that damaged statuary was included.31 The Karnak cache includes a portrait of a Ptolemaic king (now in the

Port Said National Museum) that appears to have been ritually killed.32 At Armant,

a number of broken statues were deliberately buried in a temple courtyard.33 The

treatment of the images in some of these depositions is highly suggestive of ritual

practices. Some of the bronzes were, for example, wrapped in cloth, which should

perhaps be interpreted as a kind of symbolic mummy bandage, thus mimicking the

treatment of the dead.34 The date for other, smaller caches, such as that found outside the Ptolemaic Temple of Hibis in the Kharga Oasis, may be as late as the late third

or early fourth century.35

A small number of cult statues from Roman-period temples in Egypt have survived

more or less in their original context. Among these is the assemblage from the Luxor

number of wooden statues found by the excavators were not recovered due to disintegration.

On a side note, the Great Harris Papyrus (*P.BM.* 9999) of the Twentieth Dynasty gives the total number of statues at Karnak to over 86,000.

30 Sixteen statues belonging to the cache are now among the star attractions of the Luxor Museum.

On the cache, see El-Saghir 1991 (offering a history of its discovery and a preliminary publication of individual sculptures); Joh nson 1994 (addressing further issues of identification, usurpation, style, and dating); Wilkinson 2000: 64. From ceramic finds (fourth-century Roman amphorae), El-Saghir 1991: 20 dates the deposition of the cache to the early fourth century, when the Luxor Temple was transformed into a Roman military camp and the innermost rooms of the Temple served as a shrine of the imperial cult.

31 Davies 2007: 182. The Sacred Animal Necropolis at North Saqqara gives extensive evidence of the deposition of both complete and damaged images at several points in time in the development of the sanctuary. For an overview of these depositions, which include close to 2500 bronze objects, refer to Davies 2007.

32 Stanwick 2003: 25; 104, cat. no. A36.

33 Mond & Myers 1940: 16; pl. XI.

34 Hill 2007: 180; Davies 2007: 179; figs. 76 and 77 show examples of such wrapped images.

35 Winlock 1941: 42-43; location of deposit in the *temenos* court shown on pl. XXX. This deposit included a large number of bronze figurines (refer to ibid.: pl. XXVII) that were sealed by fourth-century houses. Some of the figurines, mainly ones representing Osiris, had been wrapped in linen.

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The Luxor Serapeum with its (now headless) cult statue in situ *(photo: author).*

Fig. 2.3.

Serapeum that was discovered in 1950-1951 (Fig. 2.3).36 The cult statues in this temple, situated on a raised platform at the back of the *naos*, included statues of Isis, Osiris-Canopus, Serapis, and Apis.37 Three niches on the exterior side of the mudbrick-constructed *naos* wall also originally held statuary of secondary importance (possibly with a similar function to Traunecker's evocation images).38 The temple's Greek dedicatory inscription, placed above the main entrance door to the south, mentions the dedication of the main

cult statue (τὸ ζῴδιον) and the “rest of the statues” (τα κατάλοιπα ζῴδια) by Gaius Julius Antoninus during the reign of Hadrian.39 As we shall see shortly, excavations at Ras el-Soda outside Alexandria have revealed a similarly complete group of cult images.

Another important aspect of the power of images in Roman Egypt was the perceived

36 Leclant 1951: 454-456; Golvin et al. 1981; Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 189. In the case of the Roman temple in front of the First Pylon at Karnak, a large number of bases attest to the crowd of statues that originally stood in the *cella*, see Lauffray 1971: fig. 31.

37 On the cult statuary in the Luxor Serapeum, see Golvin et al. 1981: 135ff. Leclant 1951: Tab. XLVII, figs. 4-5 show the statues of Osiris-Canopus and Isis (before the unfortunate disappearance of her head, *contra* Hölbl 2000: 53, wrongly stating that the head was already lost in antiquity).

38 Golvin et al. 1981: 124. A fragment found by the excavators suggests that one of the statues on display was a representation of Serapis.

39 Golvin et al. 1981: 130-131.

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magical properties of statues and reliefs, especially in relation to healing cults.40 Statues with these powers were frequently covered in prayers or spells, allowing worshippers to activate those powers.41 Other images with magical properties could be rubbed or have

liquid poured on them to collect for healing use.42 The latter practice especially pertains to the so-called Horus *cippi*. These show Horus

standing atop crocodiles while grasping in his hands either snakes or scorpions. Such *cippi* were regarded as talismans against many of the natural dangers that one encountered in a desert environment, such as

snakes and scorpions. The continuity of such beliefs into the Christian period is attested in a number of texts and syncretistic images of Christ in the guise of Horus.43

Smaller, portable images, notably representations of Bes and Tutu, could serve an

apotropaic function, guarding against evil.44 This explains the numerous finds of statuettes of divinities from religious, domestic, and commercial contexts at, for example, Karanis. There, statuettes were found in the streets; they were presumably placed there for apotropaic reasons. Ithyphallic images of all sizes had a similar function.45 The accumulation of statuettes in certain temples has furthermore suggested to some Egyptologists that these small-scale representations also carried some particular form of divine presence.46

In the Nile Valley, the majority of my discussion will be devoted to the relief deco-

ration of temples.47 This is not because sculpture in the round from the Roman and

earlier periods does not appear there, but rather because the relief decoration (usually in sandstone) is so abundant and therefore allows us to follow the development of Christian 40 On the magical and healing properties of Egyptian statues, refer to Kákosy 1987; 1999; Ritner 1992; 1993: 111-190; Frankfurter 1998: 47-49 (on healing *stelae*); Pinch 2006: 90-103 (on magical statues and figurines).

41 Pinch 2006: 103. For a spectacular example of such a healing statue covered in spells against scorpions and snakes, see Naples Archaeological Museum inv. 1065 (Kákosy 1999: 119-153), roughly dating to the fourth century B.C. Kákosy notes the possible intentional mutilation of this now headless torso (ibid.: 119).

42 Kákosy 1999: 15-16; Pinch 2006: 102-103.

43 Kákosy 1999: 33-34. Horus *cippi* and other healing statues were dependent on physical contact to be effective, meaning that we have a number of such images that are heavily worn from the touch or rubbing of worshippers, especially of those parts of the body that were seen to be most potent (Pinch 2006: 103).

44 Gazda 1978: 12. At Karanis, the vast majority of statuary found is small in size. The larger pieces are most frequently from sanctuaries. Horus *cippi* can also be small in size, for suspension around the neck, similar to the use of amulets (Kákosy 1999: 16).

45 Robins 2005: 10.

46 Hill 2007: 154, quoting the example of the Temple of Osiris- *iu* at Ayn Manâwir in the Kharga Oasis, where some 400 bronze statuettes were deposited and left undisturbed after its abandonment in the early fourth century B.C. The fragmentary remains of this temple's large cult image were also located inside a wood *naos* during the French excavations in 1993. On this material, see Wuttmann, Coulon, & Gombert 2007.

47 On the wall decoration of Egyptian temples, see Arnold 1992: 47-49.

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responses to pagan images within their original architectural context.48 As in the case of cult statues in the round, the status and role of relief images must also be considered within the context of Egyptian religion. While they exist in their thousands at a wide range of sanctuaries, their religious role should not be downplayed, even when they are clearly secondary to the cult image, as is suggested by Traunecker's categorization. In the case

of Dendara, for example, temple texts attest to the divine presence of Hathor in the reliefs of her sanctuary:

She unites with her forms / that are carved in her sanctuary.

She alights on her forms / that are carved on the wall.49

This sentiment points to the important religious status of relief images in Egyptian

temples. In a detailed study of Karnak, Peter Brand has looked at the use of particular images on temple walls for a variety of cultic purposes. Dowel holes in walls are evidence for the fact that some images were covered or veiled for special veneration.50 When

veiled or covered by other means, relief images were equated with cult statues, which were similarly kept out of sight inside their *naoi* in the most sacred parts of the sanctuaries.

How much continuity is there between the visual practices of Egypt in the Roman

and Late Antique periods when Christianity was making its impact? Generally, there

is a need to understand Christians' destructive responses to pagan images as positively demonstrating the continued vitality of the images as participants in the religious order of the region, as already discussed in a broader context in Chapter 1.51 More specifically, we have Christian texts that speak of or caricature the demonic powers of pagan images.52 The tone of these texts must at least be aimed at people that had similar conceptions of images as being powerful and potentially dangerous. Why stress the point

that an image was really only a piece of wood if your audience already agreed? In later discussions of Shenoute and other early Christian figures, it will become clear just how important the performative aspects of the destruction of images were in late antique

Egypt. These performances of iconoclasm would be most effective when they reflected

local conceptions of images, specifically of their vitality and agency.

In the remainder of this chapter, I follow changing attitudes towards the pagan past

and its visual culture. The most important things to understand here are the ways in

which visual practices were appropriated by way of Christian response, and how de-

struction became part of larger strategies of political and religious polemic. This is best 48 The sculpture in the round that we have from the Nile Valley mostly comes with poor contextual data and has generally received very little scholarly attention.

49 Quoted from Assmann 2001: 42.

50 Brand 2007: 61-64. For evidence of similar practices at Medinet Habu, refer to Fischer 1959.

51 In the Egyptian context, this point has also been made repeatedly by David Frankfurter (1998; 2008a; 2008b: 140).

52 E.g. in the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, mentioning “villages… that practised the idolatrous worship of demons” (*Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 8.24, trans. Russell).

The Semantics of Christian Response

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done by looking at particular cases where violence erupted and images were destroyed or mutilated.

Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Alexandria

At several points in its history, the city of Alexandria witnessed episodes of religious and social tension that erupted into violence. The fourth and fifth centuries were no

exception. As such, the rise and ultimate triumph of Christianity took place within an already complex social, religious, and political setting in the Egyptian metropolis.53

Pagan statues came to play a significant role in these conflicts, most notably in the

attack on the Serapeum in 392. As elsewhere in the Mediterranean, statues were an

important component of civic and religious life in Alexandria, the largest and most

important centre of Greek culture in Egypt. Christian responses to pagan statues in the city demonstrate both continuity and change, and the destruction of the Serapeum's

cult statue only represents one extreme.

Using Alexandria and its hinterland as a case study for Christian responses offers both opportunities and challenges. We possess a large number of textual sources for the history of the city in Late Antiquity, especially those written by Christian church historians, but the triumphal nature of these inevitably leads to doubts over their accuracy and value.

At the same time, the archaeological remains we have from late antique Alexandria are

scant and often difficult to interpret, not least due to poor documentation. However,

recently our knowledge of the city's late antique topography has increased, allowing us to moderate the often one-sided views expressed in the triumphant Christian textual

tradition.

Several scholars have emphasized that statuary with pagan motifs continued to be on

display in late antique domestic settings in several parts of the Mediterranean, in some cases into the fifth century.54 The find of a perfectly preserved cache of statuary from a suburban villa in Sidi Bishr offers evidence of this continuity in an Alexandrian context (Fig. 2.4).55 The cache included 13 sculptures, mostly small-scale, and comprised a variety of subjects, ranging from Venus, Asklepios, and Hygieia to Egyptianizing themes. This

53 On Alexandria in Late Antiquity, see Haas 1997; Heinen 1998; McKenzie 2003a: 58-61; 2007a: 229-260; 2007b; Hah n 2004: 15-120; Watts 2006a: 143-231; Kiss 2007. On Christianization and its consequences in Alexandria, see Kaegi 1966; Bagnall 1993: 278-289; Trombley 1995: II, 1-51; Frankfurter 1998.

54 On the continued sculptural embellishment of houses in Late Antiquity, see Hannestad 1994: 105-149; 2007; Stirling 2005. However, sculpture in domestic contexts was occasionally destroyed by Christians, for example by Shenoute in the case of Gesios (Besa, *Life of Shenoute*, 125-126, and see below, "Iconoclasm and Triumphal Narratives in the Nile Valley"), and the bishop Porphyry in Gaza breaking into houses after the destruction of the Marneion (Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyrius*, 71, and see Chapter 1).

55 Several of the sculptures from Sidi Bishr are now on display in the Antiquities Museum of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. On this group, see Gassowska 1977; Hannestad 1994: 123-126; 2007: 292-293; Kiss 2007: 195-196; Marcadé 2009.

Chapter 2

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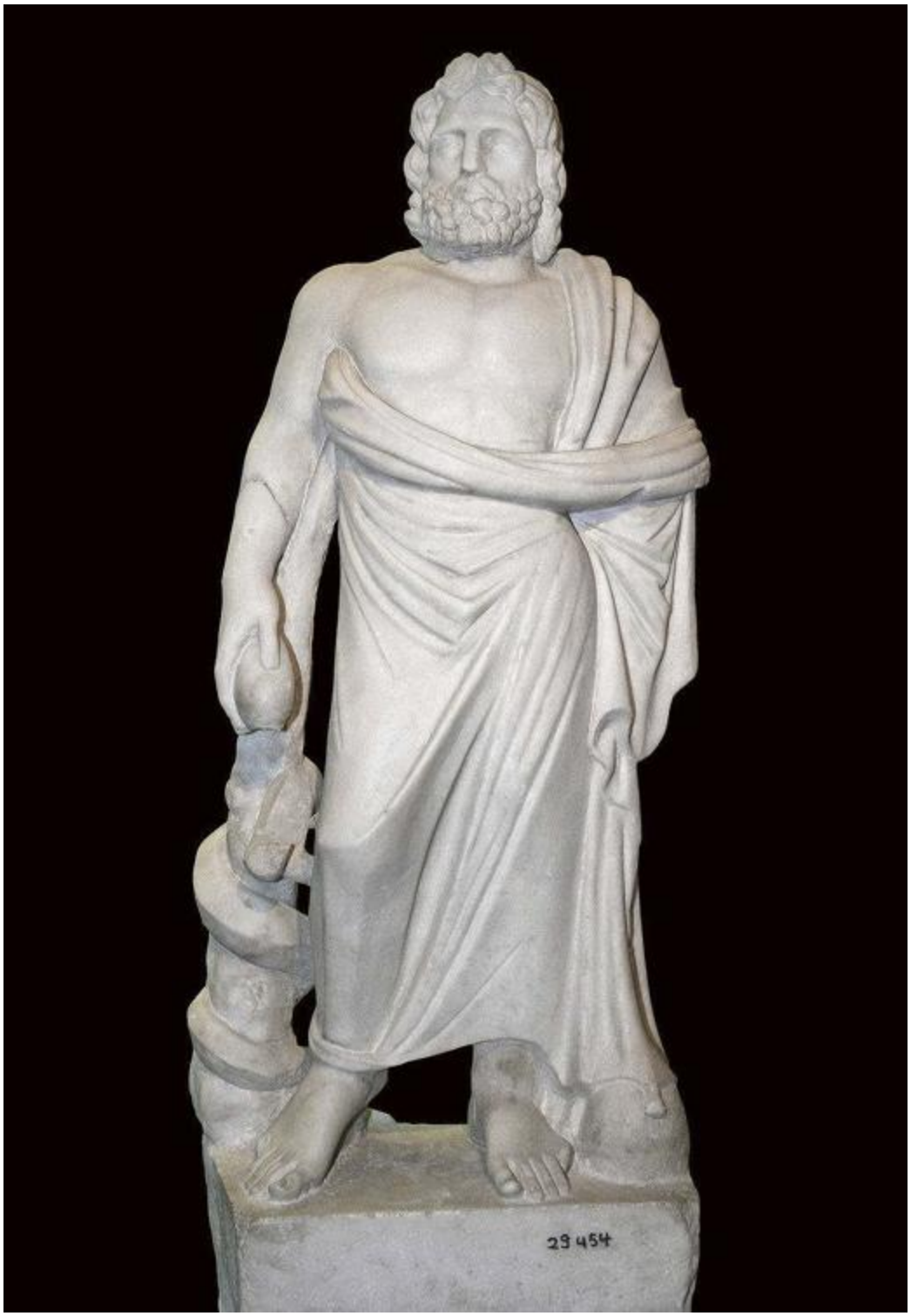

Statuette of Asklepios from Sidi **Fig. 2.4.**

Bishr (Alexandria), currently

in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Antiquities Museum, on

loan from the Greco-Roman

Museum, Mehamara

Collection, inv. 29454 (photo

by M. Mounir / © Bibliotheca

Alexandrina Antiquities

Museum).

cache also raises important issues given the fact that it appears to have been intentionally hidden, presumably as a means of safekeeping. The case of the destruction of the

Serapeum and its sculptures may give us an idea of what possible dangers the Sidi Bishr cache could have been hidden from.

The Destruction of the Serapeum and its Statuary

The background and sequence of events leading up to the destruction of the Serapeum

have been discussed extensively elsewhere.56 I will focus on the fate of the temple's

sculptural decoration, which is known from a number of textual sources but only scantly from archaeology. The attack on the Serapeum is not the earliest example of religious

conflict in Alexandria with pagan images at its centre. As early as 325, the patriarch 56 On the Serapeum, see now the fundamental work of Sabottka 2008 as well as the historical synthesis in Hah n 2004: 78-97; 2006. Hah n argues that the destruction happened in early 392. The history of the

Serapeum is also discussed in O'Leary 1938: 52-53; Haas 1997: 159-168; McKenzie 2003a: 50-57; McKenzie, Gibson, & Reyes 2004: 107-110.

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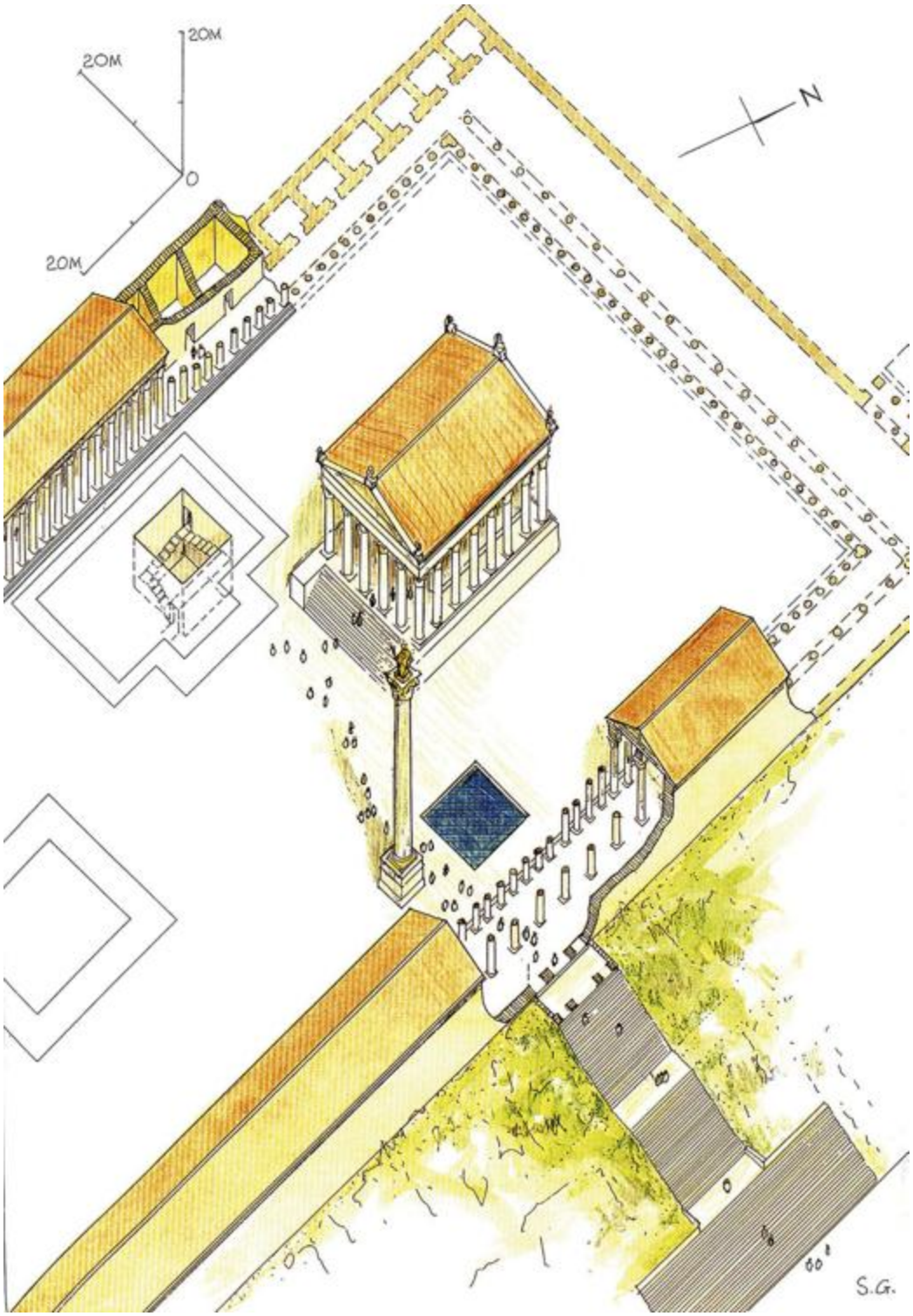

Fig. 2.5. *Reconstruction drawing of the Alexandrian Serapeum in its last phase, after 298 (after McKenzie, Gibson & Reyes 2004: pl. I).*

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Alexander was involved in a controversy concerning the local cult of Kronos and its cult statue. In the end, the temple was rededicated as the church of Theonas, and the

wooden cult statue was broken into pieces that were recarved in the shape of a cross.57

The transformation that this particular image went through attests to its continued

value as a sacred object, in spite of an apparently destructive response by Christians.

We can also observe here a parallel case to the sentiments that are expressed by Demeas'

inscription at Ephesus in which a cross was erected in place of a demonic idol.

The Serapeum, in the neighbourhood of Rhakotis on the south-western outskirts

of the city, had been founded in the early Ptolemaic period and was famous for its

admirable collection of life-like sculpture (Fig. 2.5).58 The chryselephantine cult statue of Serapis is described in great detail by Clement of Alexandria, who informs us that it was made by Bryaxis, although there is no consensus as to which sculptor he is referring to by that name.59 Some of the statue's intricate devices to 'deceive' pagan worshippers and to turn it into a 'living image' are described by Rufinus.60 However, the most important aspect of the cult statue as

conceptualized by the inhabitants of Alexandria was the longstanding idea that its destruction would lead to the end of the world.61

The fourth-century bishops of Alexandria were keen to prove that this was not the case, and their attempts to intervene in the activities of the Serapeum led to several episodes of violent conflict, including one that cost the patriarch George his life after he had vowed to destroy the sanctuary.62 The attack in 392 under the leadership of the bishop Theophilus thus represented the final outcome of an ongoing struggle between pagans

and Christians in Alexandria.

The event that ultimately led to the destruction of the Serapeum and its cult statue

also involved pagan statuary. During renovation work at a Christian basilica that had

been constructed on the remains of either a Mithraeum or a temple of Dionysus, pagan

cult objects were retrieved from an underground chamber.63 These objects included a

number of “ridiculous” statues that were taken in an impromptu procession to the city’s Agora. Interestingly, the inclusion in the parade of images of *phalli* evokes memories (at least to the modern reader) of a similar golden specimen carried in procession during

the Alexandrian festival of Ptolemaia centuries before and described by Callixeinus of 57 Haas 1997: 209-210. This is the earliest temple conversion known from Alexandria, although admittedly the source (Eutychius of Alexandria’s *Annales*) for the event is very late (tenth-century).

58 Amm. Marc. 22.16.12 describes the statues of the Serapeum as “almost breathing.” On the sculptural decoration of the Serapeum, see McKenzie,

Gibson, & Reyes 2004: 79-81; 100-101. Individual pieces from the Serapeum are collected in Tkaczow 1993.

59 On the cult statue of Serapis, see McKenzie, Gibson, & Reyes 2004: 79-81. On the iconography of Serapis, see *LIMC* 7.1: 666-692. A reminiscence of the statue may be seen in a wooden statue of Serapis preserved from the Fayyum (Alexandria Greco-Roman Museum, inv. 23352).

60 Rufinus, *Hist. eccl.* 11.23.

61 Rufinus,

Hist. eccl. 11.23.

62 A similar fate befell Dracontius, the superintendent of Alexandria's mint who had destroyed an altar (of Juno Moneta?) in the Caesareum, see Haas 1997: 288, 292-293; Kiss 2007: 191-192.

63 Mithraeum: Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 5.16. Temple of Dionysus: Sozomenus, *Hist. eccl.* 7.15.

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Rhodes.64 The procession and desecration of the images provoked the pagans to such a degree that, after an initial attack on the Christians, they barricaded themselves in the Serapeum.

Theophilus finally succeeded in closing the temple by imperial intervention after a

particularly violent stand-off between the pagans inside the Serapeum and the Christians outside. The fate of the cult statue of Serapis is known from

several sources, of which Rufinus represents the earliest and most comprehensive, writing some eleven years

after the destruction of the temple. A number of the sources give detailed narratives

of the destruction of the cult statue, carefully designed to persuade their readers that the centuries-old image did not hold supernatural powers. While some sources focus

on Theophilus as the protagonist behind the destruction of the temple, others give us

a more direct picture of the events as they unfolded on the ground. We are thus told

that it was a Christian soldier who attacked the statue, mockingly referred to as “the Old Man,” with his double-edged axe:

Thus with repeated strokes he felled the smoke-grimed deity of rotten wood, which

upon being thrown down burned as easily as dry wood when it was kindled. After

this the head was wrenched from the neck, the bushel having been taken down,

and dragged off; then the feet and other members were chopped off with axes and

dragged apart with ropes attached, and piece by piece, each in a different place,

the decrepit dotard was burned to ashes before the eyes of the Alexandria which

had worshiped him. Last of all the torso which was left was put to the torch in

the amphitheater, and that was the end of the vain superstition and ancient error

of Serapis.65

The triumphal tone of the narrative comes through very clearly in this passage, when

Rufinus informs us how the severed limbs of the powerless idol were distributed across Alexandria and burnt for citizens in all parts of the city to see. Disconcerting but also revelatory of Christian concepts of images is the fact that the murder of Hypatia was

also followed by the disarticulation of her body, and then the burning of the individual parts.66

The burning of the cult statue partly served to signify publicly the Christian vic-

tory over the cult of Serapis, but just as importantly, it very literally demonstrated for the superstitious inhabitants of Alexandria that the statue really was powerless, just as Christian polemicists had preached for centuries. A number of other Christian topoi

64 “In another cart was borne a golden phallus, measuring 180 feet in length, painted all over and bound with golden fillets, having at the end a gold star whose circumference was 9 feet,” Callixeinus of Rhodes, frag. 201 E, trans. Rice 1983: 21.

65 Rufinus,

Hist. eccl. 11.23, trans. Amidon.

66 Joh n the Nikiu explicitly links Hypatia and idolatry (*Chronicle*, 84.103). For further implications of the treatment of Hypatia’s body, see below, “Embodied Images: Response and Representation in Late Antique Egypt.” On Hypatia, see Dzielska 1995; Watts 2006b.

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on idols can be observed in the church historians that describe the destruction of Serapeum. For example, in Theodoret's version of the story, he mocks the cult statue,

calling it a "lifeless block" and "a dwelling place for mice."67 Calling attention to the rot and putrefaction inside idols was a favourite method of highlighting their corrupt nature.

The successful attack on the cult statue revealed once and for all the weakness of

their former patron god to the citizens of Alexandria. This point is also stressed in the previously mentioned fragment of a marginal illustration in the Papyrus Golenišcev

(Fig. 1.15). The far from subtle implication of this illustration, clearly showing the cult statue of Serapis with its *modius* inside the temple, is that, ultimately, Theophilus was more powerful than Serapis. The reoccurrence of the destruction of the Serapeum in

the textual sources, as well as the illustration in the Papyrus Golenišcev, furthermore demonstrates how the Church sought to maximize the memory of the momentous

event to construct triumphal narratives of the city's Christianization.

A closer look at the textual sources that describe the destruction of the Serapeum

reveals a variety of fates for the remainder of the temple's sculptural decoration. According to Socrates, the bronze statues were melted down and later recast as pots and

other utensils in the city's churches.68 Apparently, however, one statue was kept explicitly for the purpose of being mocked in a public space, not unlike how Eusebius described

the display of pagan statuary in Constantinople and how a statue of Venus came to be

mocked much later at Trier (Fig. 3.24).69 Reinterpretation of images and other pagan

objects can also be observed. The most noteworthy episode in this respect was the

interpretation by Christians roaming the temple ruins of a number of hieroglyphs as

prophetic representations of crosses.70 This may be disregarded as wishful thinking or even deliberate manipulation, but it is difficult to blame the Christians at this time since knowledge of the meaning of hieroglyphs was rapidly dwindling, as is clearly revealed

by some of the misguided readings in Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica*, written during the same period.

Archaeological excavations at the site of the Serapeum from the late 18th century

onwards have uncovered the fragmentary remains of buildings dating to the Ptolemaic

and Roman, periods, as well as some from later periods (Fig. 2.6).71 The majority of

the sculpture from the site, ranging in date from the Pharaonic to the Roman period,

was unearthed in early excavations and unfortunately comes with very little contextual 67 Theodoret,

Hist. eccl. 5.22, trans. Schaff & Wace.

68 Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 5.16. This also seems to be the common fate of the "adornments of the temples" mentioned by Firm. Mat. *Err. prof. rel.* 28.6. See also *Anth. Pal.* 9.773 on the irony of the transformation of statues into frying-pans *et alia*.

69 Euseb.,

Vit. Const. 3.54.3, also mentions mockery of pagan statues in the new capital of Constantinople.

70 Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 5.17.

71 For a thorough history of the excavations of the Serapeum, see Sabottka 2008: 3-29.

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Fig. 2.6. *The Serapeum of Alexandria*

as it appears today, Pompey's

Pillar in the centre (photo:

author).

information.72 However, it is clear that far from all the statuary from the Serapeum

was destroyed, burnt, or reused, as the literary sources tell us. Excavations in 1905-1906

unearthed a polychrome head of Serapis that shows very little damage other than from

what appears to be accidental breakage.73

The defining feature of the Serapeum site today is the column known as "Pompey's

Pillar", raised by Diocletian in 298 after his victory over the usurper Domitius Domi-

tianus. Like other columns of this type, it originally held a statue on top, most likely a portrait of Diocletian himself. Various cuttings and other features to support such a statue have been located on top of the column.74 These suggest that the statue was of

colossal size. A number of porphyry fragments, discovered in the late 18th century and now missing, may come from this statue, given that some of them were found in the

immediate vicinity of the Pillar.75 However, our limited knowledge of these fragments

after their disappearance makes it is impossible to establish whether they had in fact 72 Tkaczow 1993: 233-238; 244-247; 285-286; 335-336.

73 Alexandria Graeco-Roman Museum, inv. 3912, see Tkaczow 1993: 245, no. 160.

74 See Fraser 1972: II, 85-89, § 4, with further references.

75 Delbrueck 1932: 100-101; Tkaczow 1993: 285-286, nos. 269-269A; Kiss 2007: 187.

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fallen from the top of the column, and if so, when and why. Of course, a number of causes besides Christian violence could have been responsible for such an event, even if it is interesting to note the 13th-century mosaics in Venice's San Marco that show pagan statues being pulled down from similar columns.76 In medieval manuscripts, statues

on columns generally served as signifiers of idolatry, and they are often represented in scenes of iconoclasm.77 In this way, statues on columns almost became a kind of visual

topos for iconoclastic behaviour; the statue on top of "Pompey's Pillar" may or may not have been attacked in this way. A simple alternative would have been to re-interpret

its function, just as when in the 16th century a bronze statue of St. Peter was placed on top of Trajan's Column. It would at the same time seem unlikely that an imperial statue would have been deliberately destroyed in a riot that was authorized by the emperor,

especially in light of the events in Antioch just five years ealier.78 Later, however, local animosity towards Diocletian, who was responsible for the massacre of a substantial

part of the population of Alexandria during the usurpation in the late third century,

could perhaps have provoked a violent response.

For our interpretations of the demise of the Alexandrian Serapeum and its sculp-

tures, we depend almost entirely on a strongly biased Christian literary tradition. The archaeological evidence confirms the church historians' view that the temple was razed to the ground.79 However, it is also clear that the responses to the pagan images in the sanctuary were rather more diverse than is generally assumed, ranging from destruction to reinterpretation. The archaeology supports this view, and a number of the statues

that survive to this day may simply have been ignored or forgotten because they were

of little interest or concern to the Christians. Some statues were moved, sometimes for mockery as we saw in one case, or were simply knocked over and then forgotten. Palladas describes one such statue of Hercules in one of his epigrams. As Hercules himself states in the words of Palladas: "Even though I am a god I have learnt to serve the times."80 But as Olympius and other pagans argued after the attack on the Serapeum, the downfall

of their representations did not necessarily impair the powers of the gods.81 Olympius'

statement is testimony to a different conception of paganism that placed less emphasis on common visual practices and instead highlights the importance of individual beliefs that do not require iconic representations of the pagan pantheon.

Further Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Alexandria

A number of other sculptures from Alexandria provide further evidence of Christian

responses to pagan images. Some of these can be included in a larger group of sculptures that were furnished with secondary carvings of Christian crosses sometime during Late

76 Sauer 2003: 65.

77 Kristensen forthcoming a.

78 On the statue riots in Antioch in 387, see, most recently, Van Dam 2008.

79 McKenzie, Gibson, & Reyes 2004: 107.

80 Καιρῷ δουλεύειν καὶ θεὸς ὤν ἔμαθον (*Anth. Pal*. 9.441, trans. Paton).

81 *Anth. Pal*. 9.441.

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Fig. 2.7. *Statue of a young Marcus Aurelius with a secondary carving of a cross, Alexandria Graeco-Roman Museum (photo: J.F. Gout, after Empereur 2000, used by permission).*

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Antiquity. The most prominent example of this kind of response is found on an over-life-size, cuirassed statue of a young Marcus Aurelius (Fig. 2.7).82 On the lower part of the cuirass, the original relief decoration has been removed and a cross has been carved in its place. Two further examples of secondary carvings of crosses on sculpture, on a male and a female portrait, are also known from Alexandria.83 The secondary crosses on these sculptures are located on the head, which is the most common location for this

kind of mark. Very little is known about the archaeological context of these sculptures, and it is impossible to date when they were furnished with crosses.

The carving of crosses on statuary can be interpreted in both positive and negative

ways. It may be understood as a reaction against the iconophobia inherent in early

Christian literature dealing with images, as a way of neutralizing the powers believed to be inherent in the image, perhaps even as exorcism. Yet it can also be seen in a more positive light, as part of a ritual act of baptism or as a means of accepting the pagan image into a Christian life.84 Most examples with crosses on the forehead are found in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, but the Alexandrian examples do not help us

to solve the matter of their interpretation. The statue of Marcus Aurelius was found

alongside a number of other sculptures, none of which were furnished with a cross,

and it is difficult to understand why this particular representation was singled out for this response; its monumental size (2.15 m in height) may have been a factor, evidence perhaps that it may have been a cult image or at least placed in a prominent setting

that gave it divine associations.

One very late textual source suggests that some sculptures from pagan temples in

Alexandria survived intact in their original setting until the seventh century and the Arab conquest of Egypt. A group of statues in the Tychaeum which included representations of both gods and men is mentioned by the Byzantine historian Theophylact

Simocatta as still standing on their pedestals.85 This may imply that the statues had

been reinterpreted as Christian figures as happened at other times, most notably in the 82 Alexandria Greco-Roman Museum, inv. 3250, see Tkaczow 1993: 248-249, no. 169 (note incorrect inv.) and Kristensen 2012: cat. no. B10. The statue was found sometime around 1872 during construction work on Horeya Street at the site of the former Zizinia Theatre. It was found together with a nude torso (Tkaczow 1993: 248, no. 168), an Isis-Tyche (ibid.: 249, no. 170) and a possible portrait of Alexander the Great, also over-life-size (ibid.: 313, no. 342, now missing).

83 Male portrait: Alexandria Greco-Roman Museum, inv. 22186, see Kristensen 2012: cat. no. A9.

Female portrait: Alexandria Greco-Roman Museum, inv. 3607, see Kristensen 2012: cat. no. A8.

84 Hjort 1993: 111; Kristensen 2012. The use of the cross as a means of “purifying” a formerly pagan place or monument is commonly attested

(e.g. in *CTh* 16.10.25), also in the literary sources concerning Alexandria. Rufinus informs us that after the destruction of the Serapeum, busts of Serapis in public and private spaces were defaced and then replaced by crosses (*Hist. eccl.* 2.29).

85 Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, 8.13.10. On the Tychaeum and its sculptures, see Fraser 1972: I, 242; II, 392-393, n. 417; Gibson 2007; McKenzie 2007b: 67; and the tentative reconstruction in McKenzie & Reyes forthcoming. The statues included Tyche, Gaia, a number of Nikes, and Ptolemaic royal portraits, beginning with Alexander.

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Fig. 2.8. *Fragment of ivory finger*

from the chryselephantine

statue found at Kom el-Dikka,

Alexandria (photo courtesy of

Elzbieta Rodziewicz).

case of Marcus Aurelius' equestrian statue on Campidoglio. There is no archaeological

evidence, however, to illuminate this testimony further.

The archaeological material from Alexandria on the whole confirms the complex

nature of responses to pagan statues during Late Antiquity; this is perhaps best demonstrated by the sculpture unearthed by the Polish excavations at Kom el-Dikka.86 Finds

include sculpture in the round dating to the sixth century, and although a large part of the material is heavily fragmented there is little to suggest that systematic destruction or mutilation took place.87 Some finds raise questions, however. Fragments of a life-size chryselephantine statue that was apparently hacked into pieces and then deliberately

burnt were found in a mid-fifth-century destruction layer west of the imperial baths

(Fig. 2.8).88 It has been proposed that the statue was of Serapis or Isis, and its original location may have been in a nearby sanctuary. Alongside the chryselephantine fragments two headless busts of Serapis were found, both blackened by fire (Fig. 2.9).89 These also appear to have been mutilated before disposal. Although the date of the deposition and burning of these objects is slightly later, the find is intriguing given the historical evidence quoted above that images of Serapis were burnt after the destruction of the Serapeum.

It can, however, be difficult to establish the cause of such fire damage, even if in other cases it has been connected to Christian violence.90 This small cache of burnt sculptures may be one of the best archaeological cases of Christian mutilation and destruction

86 The sculptures from the Polish excavations at Kom el-Dikka (in both public and private contexts) have been published in Kiss 1988. On the late antique and medieval levels at Kom el-Dikka, see Kiss et al. 2000: 131-144.

87 A statuette of Hygieia was found face-down, reused as a paving stone, presumably in the late fourth century, in House H at Kom el-Dikka (see Daszewski 1991), but it is difficult to interpret this kind of reuse or spoliation as decidedly destructive. Single finds of fragments (fingers, feet, etc.) are numerous, see Kiss 1988: figs. 84-130.

88 Rodziewicz 1991; 1992; *ThesCRA* II: 506, no. 765. Rodziewicz notes that “the statue was first divided into smaller pieces and burnt afterwards. There is no doubt that the figure was destroyed intentionally” (1991: 121).

89 Kiss 1988: 50-51, cat. no. 76; 51-52, cat. no. 78; Rodziewicz 1992: 320, 324, fig. 7.

90 Christians have been supposed to be responsible for the fire damage at a number of temples (with statuary) in Cyrene, see Goodchild, Reynolds, & Herington 1958: 40.

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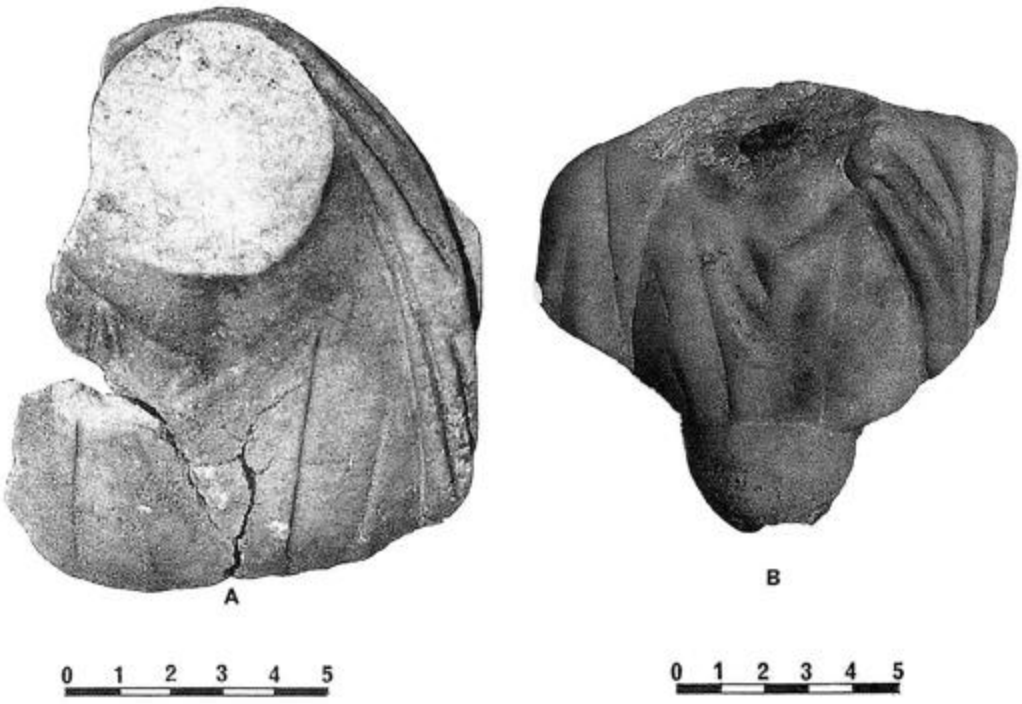

Small, headless busts of Serapis found at Kom el-Dikka, Alexandria (after Rodziewicz 1992: 324, **Fig. 2.9.**

Fig. 7).

of pagan statues from Alexandria, and it will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Alexandria's Hinterland

Turning to material from the immediate hinterland of Alexandria, a number of other

sites provide evidence of Christian responses to pagan images, both through textual and archaeological sources. Many of these cases are slightly later in date than those known from Alexandria itself and suggest continuity of pagan practices in the countryside into the fifth century, supporting Frankfurter's view of the slow process of Christianization in Egypt.

The best known incident involving statuary occurred in 489 at the site of Menouthis,

east of Alexandria.91 Here, the patriarch Peter Mongus located a large collection of

idols hidden behind a double wall in what was presumably a Temple of Isis.92 The

Syriac *Life of Severus* by Zachariah Scholasticus allows us to follow the events as they 91 Now treated extensively by Watts 2010; see also Kaegi 1966; Trombley 1995: II, 219-225; Hah n 2004: 101-105. For a summary of the archaeological finds at Menouthis/Canopus, see Breccia 1926. For a recent re-evaluation of the identification of the site and the location of the temple, refer to Stolz 2008.

92 As Watts notes, the Syriac text is not entirely clear and the term used may refer to a house, temple, church, or room (2010: 13).

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unfolded. The idols that the patriarch's men found had apparently been taken at some point from another pagan cult site (Memphis?) and they also included several sacred

animals, such as dogs, cats, monkeys, crocodiles, and other reptiles – testimony to the diversity of Egyptian religious images.93 Some of the images were considered to be very old because of their poor state of preservation, and these presumably wooden images

were immediately delivered to the flames at Menouthis. The worst atrocity, however,

was not the presence of the statues themselves, but the fact that the patriarch and his entourage found clear evidence of sacrifice and worship. Incense and sacrificial cakes were found, and both an altar and a representation of Kronos were covered in blood.94

These were the criteria used to establish that a pagan cult was active according to the Theodosian Code, and they were therefore important to the events that followed.95 The

images of bronze and others of “artistic value” were inventoried, and then loaded onto twenty camels that took them to a public “trial” held in the centre of Alexandria, at

which Peter presided:96

When he [Peter] was seated with them [the city officials], he had the pagan priest

brought to the centre, and ordered him to stand in an elevated place. When the

idols were brought to the centre, he asked: “And what is the demonic cult of

this soul-less matter?” And he ordered him to mention the name of each one of

them, and what was the formal cause of each one of them. Already, all the people

were hurrying there to look, and they listened to what was said, and then made

fun of the ridiculous powers of the pagan gods that the priest was telling them

about. When the brass altar was brought, and the wooden dragon, he admitted

the sacrifices that he had dared to offer, and that the dragon was the one that had

led Eve astray. This had been conveyed to him by tradition from earlier priests,

he said, and he admitted that the pagans worshipped it. And so the dragon, too,

was turned over to the fire with the rest of the idols.97

This vivid account gives us a lot of detail about the public aspect of the destruction of pagan images at a time when the population of Alexandria was almost entirely Christian. Although the patriarch claims to be unfamiliar with the iconography and names

of the pagan gods, his ability to mock their infamous ways shows otherwise. The public

"trial" bears all the bureaucratic traits that the Theodosian Code assigned; inventories were made before the idols were transported to the city, and the legality of the action 93 Zachariah Scholasticus, *Life of Severus*, ed. Kugener, 29. Kugener notes that the Syriac text is unclear on the location of the origin of the sculptures, but suggests Memphis.

94 Zachariah Scholasticus, *Life of Severus*, ed. Kugener, 27-29.

95 *CTh* 16.10.12.2. See also Chapter 1, "Breaking the Gods: Christian Perspectives."

96 Zachariah Scholasticus, *Life of Severus*, ed. Kugener, 30.

97 Zachariah Scholasticus, *Life of Severus*, ed. Kugener, 33-34, trans. Ambjörn. McKenzie & Reyes forthcoming suggest that the fragments of the chryselephantine statue from Kom el-Dikka are related to this episode of Christian destruction.

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The cult statues of the Ras el-Soda temple immediately after their discovery (after Adriani 1940: Pl. **Fig. 2.10.**

LIX, Fig. 1).

is emphasized by the presence of not only the patriarch but what is portrayed as the

entire city, including all of its highest officials. The response of the Christian authorities was thus deeply embedded in local politics and a performative display of power.

At the same time, as Frank Trombley has suggested, the compilation of the inventory

demonstrates certain pecuniary motives, and it was clearly only the worthless wooden

idols that were delivered to the flames.98

Archaeological finds from three other sites in the hinterland of Alexandria give fur-

ther insights into the late antique fate of pagan sculpture. Excavations in 1936 at Ras el-Soda, immediately east of Alexandria, revealed the well-preserved remains of an Isis temple with its assemblage of five cult statues in perfect condition and still *in situ* on a podium in the *naos* (Fig. 2.10).99 The details of how this particular sanctuary went out of use are not known, but it seems that it was completely forgotten and simply covered by sand, providing a stark contrast with the fate of the Menouthis collection.

Recent Hungarian excavations inside the sanctuary of Osiris at Taposiris Magna,

located on the Mediterranean coast 45 km west of Alexandria, demonstrate some of

the difficulties that arise when interpreting sculpture in secondary contexts.100 Like 98 Trombley 1995: II, 223-224.

99 Adriani 1940; Naerebout 2006; 2007.

100 Arnold 1992: 221; Empereur 1998: 222-227. On the recent Hungarian excavations, see Vörös 2001; 2004; 2007: 96-115. Three churches are known at Taposiris, see Grossmann 2002a: 381-387.

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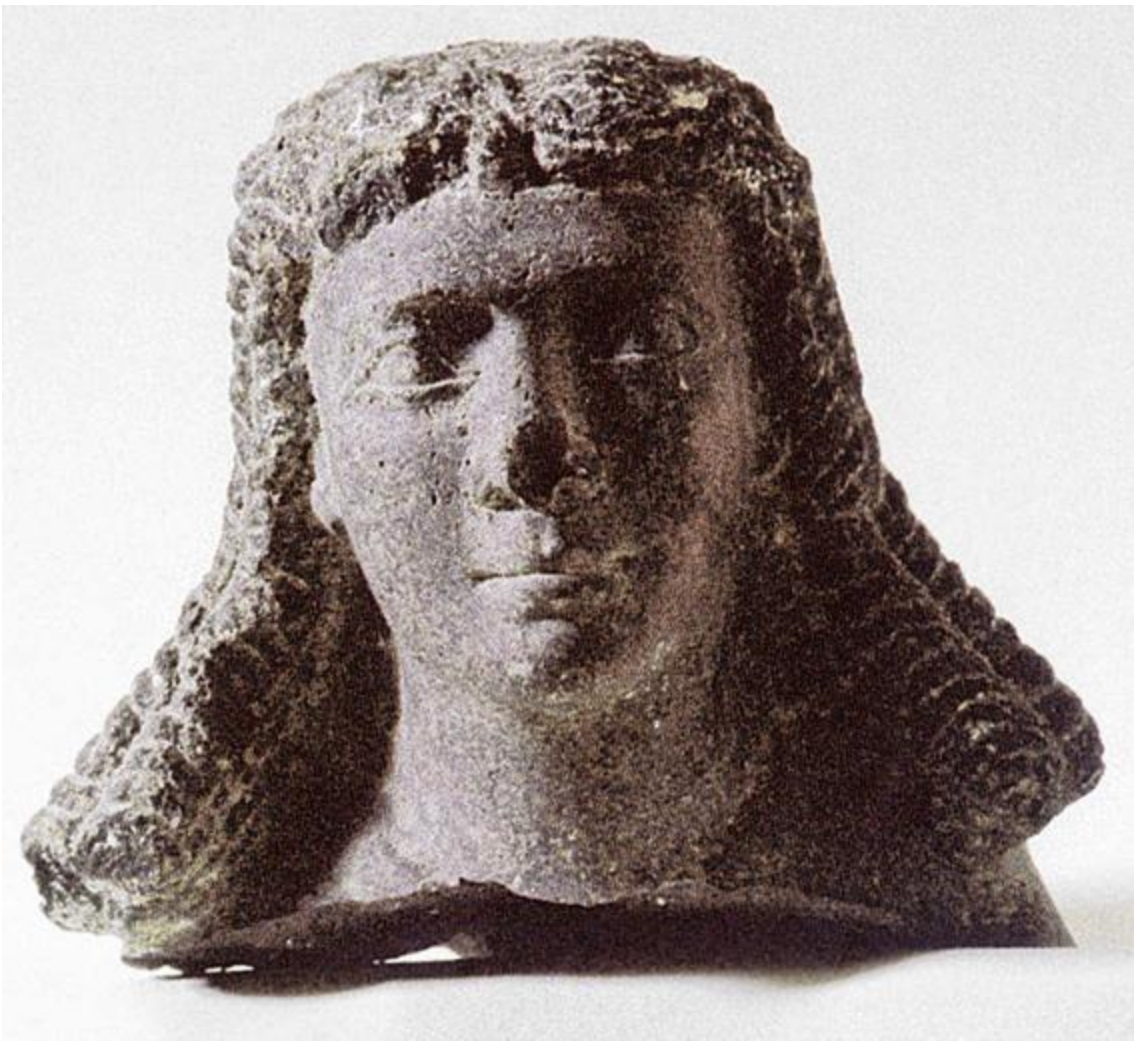

Fig. 2.11. *Head of Isis from Taposiris*

Magna (photo courtesy of

Győző Vörös).

a number of other Egyptian sanctuaries that shared the same fort-like structure, the

temple at Taposiris was converted into a Roman fortress in the second or third century.

The temple was converted to a church, probably in the fourth century, and the site

is known to have been in use as a Coptic monastery.101 During the excavations, three

fragments of a basalt half-life-size statue of Isis were found at several different locations within the sanctuary.102 In spite of its small size, the excavators have suggested that this was the temple's cult statue, and it appears to have been found near its original niche.103 The well-preserved head was found in the temple courtyard (Fig. 2.11). It had been broken off from the body below the neck, and the crown was damaged. A further

two fragments of the torso had been reused as pivot stones in the south gate, dating

to the early Byzantine period. Close to the pivot stones, a cross had been carved on

the pavement. The excavators have suggested that the statue had been hidden by the

site's last pagan inhabitants, a fate shared with a number of cult vessels also found at Taposiris, and then later uncovered by iconoclastic monks. There is no evidence for

this, and it is very difficult to interpret the fragmented state of the statue. Looking at the individual pieces, the head is very well-preserved, and although it has been cut off 101 Ward-Perkins 1946; Adriani 1952. The exact date of the construction of the monastery is not known, but written sources suggest that it predates the seventh century.

102 Vörös 2001: 136-153; 2004: 128-139. Other interesting finds from the excavations that may be suggestive of the religious climate during the period of Christianization include a fragment of a life-size male portrait in black granite (Vörös 2001: 77; 2004: 60) and the temple's inventory of metal vessels, hidden in the corner of a small room (Vörös 2004: 94-125).

103 Vörös 2001: 148, reporting that it was found "[t]hree metres to the west of the former statue niche."

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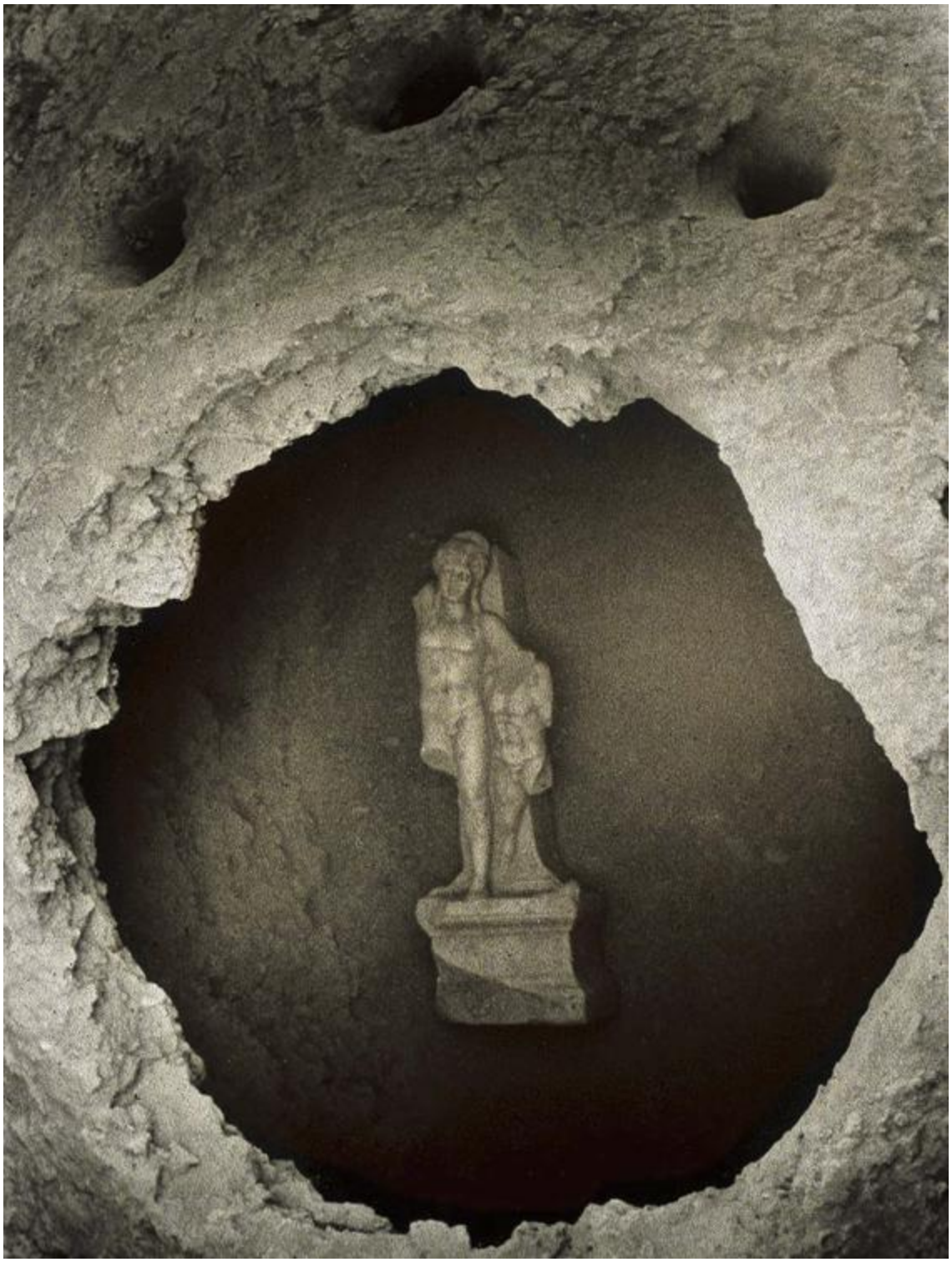

Trapezophoron of Dionysus

Fig. 2.12.

supported by a satyr, found in a

9th-century ceramic oven at Abu

Mina (after Engemann 1998a:

Abb. 11).

from the torso, it is difficult to establish the cause of this break. The other pieces are very fragmented, but have also been shaped into a convenient size for architectural

reuse. We do not know if the statue had been mutilated before parts of it were reused

as pivot stones. Was this reuse purposefully demeaning or simply pragmatic? Would

the fragments even have been recognized as being from an idol? Too little has so far

been published about the archaeological context of the Taposiris statue to establish the motives behind its fragmentation and later reuse.

At Abu Mina, a major Christian pilgrimage centre 45 km southwest of Alexandria, a

number of intriguing sculptural finds have been made.104 These attest to a number of

different Christian responses to pagan imagery. Large parts of the site were destroyed in the Sassanian invasion of Egypt in 619, and the pilgrimage centre never fully recovered.

A black porphyry fragment of a portrait head from the site has been furnished with a

cross, demonstrating an inherently ambiguous form of response.105 This particular find is sadly lacking in contextual information, but another

sculptural find unearthed during 104 For an overview of the site's development, refer to Grossmann 1998; Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 116-119.

105 Kristensen 2012: cat. no. A7.

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German excavations in 1969 in the "Südostanbau" of the Great Basilica is testimony to a different response at a very late point in time. A *trapezophoron*, decorated with a sculptural group of Dionysus with a small supporting figure of a satyr, was found in

a ninth-century disused kiln (Fig. 2.12).106 The *trapezophoron* was found more or less intact, although the head of the satyr had been broken off and Dionysus' right arm

and leg are missing. Its deliberate deposition in the kiln has been interpreted by Josef Engemann as a case of Christian iconophobia. One may also speculate how and for

what purposes these first- and second-century sculptures ended up at Abu Mina in the

first place, a site of little importance before the fourth century.107 Finds such as these from the hinterland of Alexandria demonstrate that pagan sculpture in some cases was

visible in sacred spaces almost up until the end of the first millennium.

The Range of Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Alexandria

In spite of interpretive problems, the archaeological and textual sources from late antique Alexandria and its hinterland suggest a wide spectrum of Christian responses to

pagan sculpture, including: full-scale destruction in the case of the cult statue of Serapis; rituals of exorcism or neutralization such as the three examples of Alexandrian statues with secondary carvings of crosses; pragmatic reuse as seen at Taposiris, the Serapeum, and the temple of Kronos; public display and mockery of idols (again in the case of the Serapeum); and finally reinterpretation, of which the Tychaeum sculptures and "Pompey's Pillar" may be examples. We also see an example from Sidi Bishr of the deliberate deposition of sculpture perhaps as a means of safekeeping from Christian violence,

although this kind of deposition of statuary has been a hotly debated topic.108 In the case of Ras el-Soda, the temple and its cult statues seem simply to have been forgotten.

This spectrum of responses has implications for how we understand late antique religious conflict and violence, and suggests an inherent Christian ambivalence towards pagan

statues. When destruction took place, it usually carried social, symbolic, or political (and perhaps even economic in the case of Menouthis) significance, rather than being

limited to religious motivations.

The most important cult images (Traunecker's action images) were clearly most vul-

nerable to Christian destruction. Other pagan images did not have the same kind of

106 Engemann 1998a; 1998b; Stirling 2005: 235, n. 40. Engemann dates the *trapezophoron* to the second century and attributes it to an Attic workshop. On the find context, he observes that the sculpture was "auf ein Sandbett gelegt und dann mit Sand zugedeckt worden" (1998b: 173-174).

107 Sculptural finds at Abu Mina are indeed rare. Only a small number of other fragments, some belonging to a garland sarcophagus, have been found during the excavations, cf. Severin & Severin 1987: 27; Engemann 1998a: 98. Severin & Severin note the deliberate mutilation of the face of Eros on the sarcophagus fragment. Two Horus-Harpocrates *stelae* and a fragment of an Egyptian relief were also found in excavations in the early 20th century, see Kaufmann 1910: 71, Abb. 24-26.

108 See e.g. the discussion over the deposition of sculpture in House C (also known as the Omega House) at the Athenian Agora in Frantz 1988: 90 (deposition as reverence) and Rothaus 2000: 117 (deposition as exorcism or ritual burial).

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religious and ideological value, and were often simply ignored or forgotten. This modifies many narratives of late antique social and religious transformation, in which Alexandria is often presented as a place where religious conflict and violence was rampant. There is ample evidence to suggest this. The violence that erupted may be seen as the result of the “brutalization of local politics” or “progressive Christianization,”109 and may have had little to do with the edicts issued by the imperial government. Regardless of the

cause of the violence, its limits are clearly seen in both the textual and archaeological sources as nowhere is systematic destruction or mutilation of pagan sculpture evident.

It seems that even in Alexandria, undisputed archaeological evidence for the Christian destruction of images can be hard to come by, although there are a number of potentially suggestive cases, especially the find of the burnt and beheaded statues at Kom el-Dikka.

The material that we do have gives some indication of how images were perceived in

late antique Alexandria, a topic that will be explored in more detail in the last section of this chapter.

Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in the Nile Valley

From Alexandria and its hinterland, our investigation continues to the Nile Valley

where the unique conditions of preservation have given Egypt a rich heritage of temple architecture and decoration. The scale of preservation differs greatly from in the Delta, where the wet climate and annual inundations have almost completely eradicated a

great number of the many important temples and sites that once stood there. Thus,

little remains to give us an idea of the variety of Christian responses to pagan images and sanctuaries in this area immediately southeast of Alexandria.110

The methodological implications of the complex afterlives of Egyptian temples have

already been discussed. Many of the temples in the Nile Valley date to the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, but several sites such as Karnak and Luxor have histories that stretch

over several millennia. During the Late Period, for example, many temples were sub-

jected to several acts of plundering that included the removal of cult images, notably in connection with the Persian periods of occupation (525-404 and 343-322 B.C.). During

their campaigns in the Near East, the Ptolemies brought some of these images back to

Egypt, but it is an important reminder of the non-static nature of the sanctuaries.111 The situation at Luxor is furthermore suggestive of how many sites came to be appropriated and reused over time, the physical fabric being heavily modified in the process. The

Luxor Temple was transformed into a military camp during the rule of Diocletian, more

precisely in late 301 or early 302 (Fig. 2.13).112 A large number of architectural elements 109 “Brutalization”: Mitchell 2007: 320; “progressive Christianization”: Haas 1997: 179.

110 But see O’Leary’s remarks on Bubastis and other sites in the Delta (1938: 55).

111 Lorton 1999: 126-128.

112 El-Saghir et al. 1986; Bagnall 1993: 263 (emphasizing that the temple had gone out of use before the construction of the Roman camp, although this may not be the case); Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 188-192. On the dating evidence, refer to El Saghir et al. 1986: 20-23.

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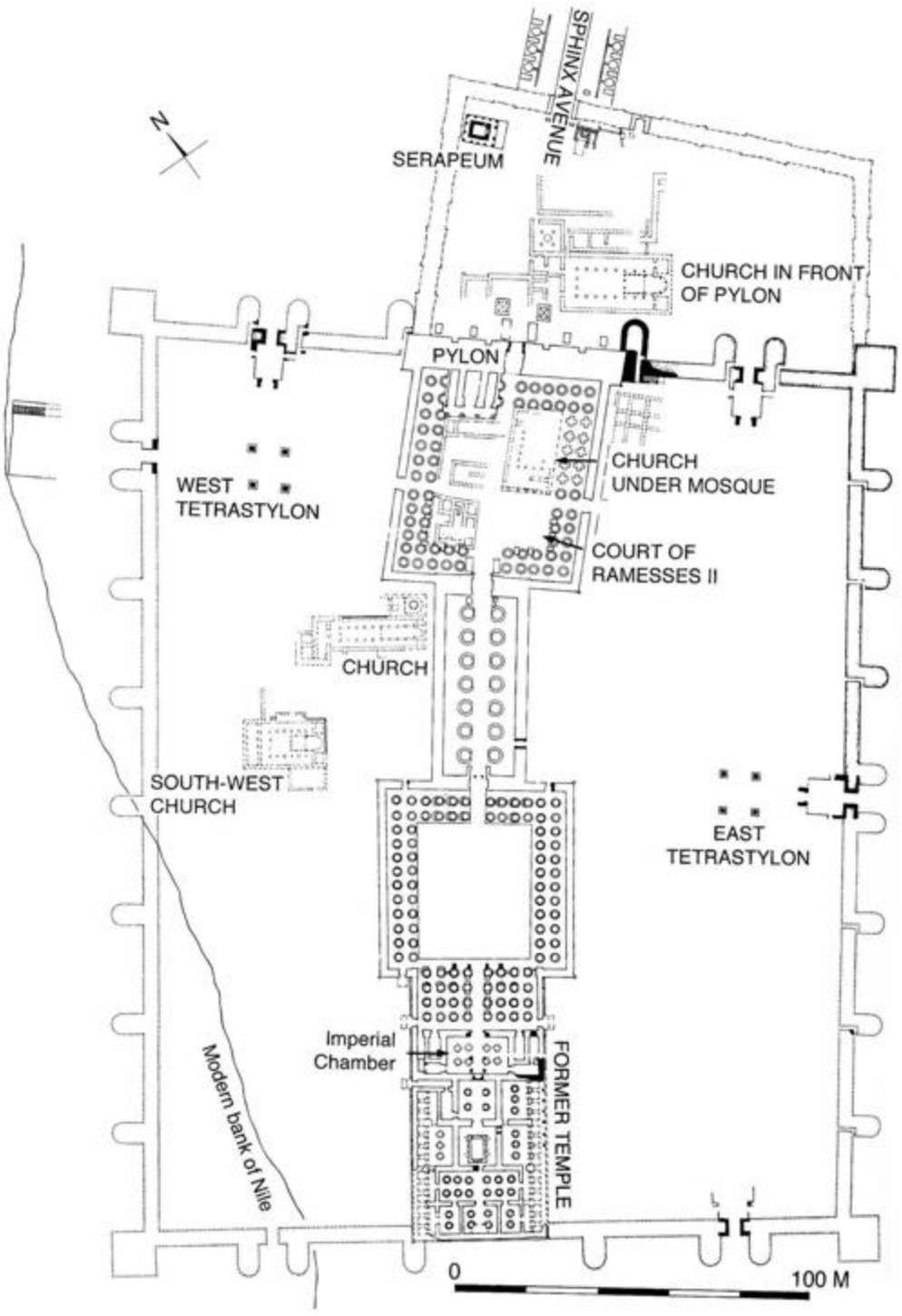

Fig. 2.13. *Plan of the Luxor Temple showing layout as fort and with later churches (from El-Saghir 1986: Pl. I, used by permission from IFAO, Cairo).*

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belonging to the Pharaonic periods were reused in the construction of the camp.113 A shrine of the standards with elaborate wall paintings was installed, effectively covering up the reliefs of the antechambers to the holy of holies, and a statue of Constantius was later set up in the hypostyle hall.114 The site was still referred to as κάστρον Θηβῶν as late as 502, and it served as a Persian camp during their occupation of Egypt between

619 and 629.115 Testimonies to its complex afterlife are the site's five churches and the mosque of Abu el-Haggag that was constructed in the Court of Ramses II in the 13th

century.116 It is obvious that in a context such as this, with multiple phases of reuse, it is difficult to date specific cases of destruction and mutilation, although inferences can be made by looking at the ways in which these took place.117

The temples of the Nile Valley were decorated with literally thousands of relief im-

ages. The extent of this evidence makes a complete survey impossible, and I shall in the following focus on a selection of case studies, mainly opting for those where there is suggestive evidence of the nature of late antique phases. I discussed earlier some of the visual practices that pertain to the region, and these must also be taken into account when considering Christian responses. However, before turning to the archaeological

evidence, I will first provide an overview of the late antique sources that give accounts of Christian responses to pagan images in the Nile Valley. These not only offer glimpses of the individual agents of response, but

also provide us with some idea of how at least some specific groups of early Christians conceptualized the pagan images that they

encountered.

Iconoclasm and Triumphal Narratives in the Nile Valley

In the Nile Valley, there exists a strongly biased body of Christian written sources that deal with Christian responses to pagan images, which are more powerful even than those found in Alexandria. Their striking and potent language has made them irresistible to

modern scholars, but as noted in Chapter 1, it is necessary to consider the degree to

which such accounts reflect a historical reality. They often use scenes of iconoclasm to construct triumphal narratives that are informative about how pagan images were used

for rhetorical purposes in Christian writings.

The earliest attested episode of a destructive Christian response to pagan images in

Egypt is the legendary story of the monk Apollo of Hermopolis (Ashmunein), compiled

113 El-Saghir et al. 1986: 37-98.

114 Only the base remains *in situ*. On the wall paintings in the imperial cult room, refer to Deckers 1979.

115 El-Saghir et al. 1986: 32-33; Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 192.

116 On the churches, refer to Grossmann 2002a: 448-454. A small number of Christian graffiti furthermore attest to the temple’s late antique afterlife (El-Saghir et al. 1986: 116, no. 40; 119-120, no.

49). The present, elevated position of the mosque of Abu el-Haggag shows the extent to which the ground level had been raised between antiquity and its construction in the 13th century, see Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 192.

117 On the attribution of destruction of reliefs at Luxor to both the Amarna and late antique period, see Brand 2000: 95-101.

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in the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (often known in English as *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*). The text itself dates from the end of the fourth century, but the account gives a narrative of events taking place sometime earlier in that century.118 At a procession that formed part of the Nile festival, priests and pagans were carrying a wooden idol through a village with a large temple, when the story's hero Apollo, who had been instructed by God to destroy paganism during a 40-year sojourn in the desert, intervened:119

The priests together with the people, working themselves into a bacchic frenzy,

used to carry [the idol] in procession through the villages, no doubt performing

the ceremony to ensure the flooding of the Nile. It so happened that on one such

occasion Apollo passed by that place with a few of the brothers. As soon as he saw

the crowd passing in a frenzy through the countryside as if possessed by devils,

he bent his knees and prayed to the Saviour, and at once stopped all the pagans

in their tracks. Although they pushed one another, no one was able to advance

any further from that spot.120

In this case, what was particularly offensive in the eyes of the readers (and listeners) of the legend of Apollo was the impact that the idol had on the pagans; they danced

and acted as if in a trance and possessed by devils. When the villagers discovered that Apollo was responsible for this supernatural act, they tried to appease him by removing the idol, but it would not move, even with the aid of oxen. They then called on Apollo, who untied the pagan priests after having prayed to God.121 The villagers, in gratitude to Apollo, subsequently converted to Christianity and set fire to the idol. As such, the account follows in the tradition of similar episodes of the destruction of idols that in turn led to conversion of pagans.122 It also uses conventional topoi, such as referring to the statue as a piece of wood (ξύλινον), and by having the newly converted pagans

destroy their own idol.123 Dijkstra has suggested that, due to its popularity, the story of Apollo became a paradigm for the confrontational narratives of later hagiographies

that feature protagonists displaying iconoclastic behaviour.124 Its historical value should therefore not be overestimated. On the other hand, the story clearly had significant

resonance among later audiences.

118 Frankfurter 2008b: 136; 141.

119 *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, 8.24-29, ed. Festugière.

120 ἐπόμπευον δὲ περιφέροντες αὐτὸ κατὰ τὰς κώμας οἱ ἱερεῖς βακχεύοντες μετὰ τοῦ πλήθους, ὡς δὴ ἡπέρ τοῦ ποταμίου ὕδατος τὴν τελετὴν ἀποδιδόντες. Συνέβη δὲ κατ᾽ ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ

ἐκεῖθεν παριέναι τὸν Ἀπολλῶ ἅμα τισὶν ἀδελφοῖς ὀλίγοις. ὡς δὲ εἶδεν τὸ πλῆθος ἐξαίφνης

δαιμονιωδῶς κατὰ τὴν χώμαν μαινόμενον, κάμψας τὰ γόνατα καὶ προσευξάμενος τῷ σωτῆρι

πάντας ἐξαίφνης τοὺς Ἕλληνας ἀκινήτους ἐποίησεν (*Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, 8.25-26, trans. Russell).

121 *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, Apollo 8.29, ed. Festugière.

122 See Chapter 1, “Why Did Christians Destroy Pagan Sculpture?”

123 ξύλινον *: Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, 8.25, ed. Festugière.

124 Dijkstra 2008: 92.

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The figure that has featured most prominently in the scholarship on the more violent aspects of Christianization in Egypt is undoubtedly Shenoute, head of the monastic

federation to which the White Monastery belonged, founded around 385 and reputedly

home to some 4000 monks.125 Modern scholarship shows a wide variety of assessments

of Shenoute – who is said to have lived for over one hundred years (*c*. 348-465) – ranging from the quintessential late antique Christian fanatic to a shrewd religious politician.126

In his works, he uses some of the conventional topoi of idolatry, that they are man-made images of wood and stone worshipped by people possessed by Satan. Besa, Shenoute's

successor as abbot of the White Monastery, wrote a biography of him, and his impor-

tance is unequalled in early Coptic literature.127 The White Monastery, as large as the sanctuary of Dendara, is located just outside Athribis (Coptic Atripe) in Upper Egypt

and contains several *spolia* from pagan temples, some from as far away as Abydos.128

Recent excavations in the monastery have brought to light a funerary chapel that may

have belonged to him.129 Interestingly, this chapel was decorated with both geometric

and figural paintings, including a portrait of Shenoute that is identified by an inscription.

On a number of occasions in his hagiography and other texts, Shenoute confronted

local pagans in both public and private spheres when he participated in the destruc-

tion of idols and the conversion of temples to churches. The fragmentary state of his

literary corpus and his extraordinarily long career makes it difficult to establish a firm chronology, but Stephen Emmel has been able to make a prelimary reconstruction of

these confrontations and their social context.130 The first public confrontation was the burning of a temple at Atripe, where Shenoute and his monks “burned that place of

idols with fire along with everything that was in it,” although the extent of this de-

struction has recently come into question based on new archaeological fieldwork that

shows that the temple in question cannot be the town’s large Temple of Triphis, which

125 On Shenoute and his White Monastery, see Leipoldt 1904; Timm 1984: 601-633; Young 1993; Trombley 1995: II, 203-240; Emmel 2002; 2004; 2008; Grossmann 2002b; Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 179-182; Hah n 2004: 223-269; Sauer 2003: 102-105; Emmel & Römer 2008.

126 Fanatic: The title of Gaddis 2005, a recent discussion of late antique religious violence, is “There is no crime for those who have Christ,” a quotation from a letter by Shenoute, cf. ibid.: 1. Politician: See Trombley 1995: II, 209-210.

127 On the literary corpus of Shenoute, refer to Emmel 2004. On problems of genre and authorship in relation to the *Life of Shenoute*, see Lubomierski 2006; 2007.

128 Photographs of *spolia* in Monneret de Villard 1926: pls. 146-7. See also Hah n 2004: 263-266; Sauer 2003: 102; McKenzie 2007a: 275; Klotz 2010. Excavations are currently being undertaken at the site by the White Monastery Project: www.yale.edu/egyptology/ae_white.htm (last accessed 17 August 2012). For a more general discussion of *spolia* use in Egyptian churches, refer to Grossmann 2002a: 170-174.

129 Bolman, Davis, & Pyke 2010.

130 On the chronology of Shenoute’s anti-pagan activities, see Emmel 2002: 113; 2008: 162-163.

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was turned into a nunnery in the seventh century.131 The extent of the fire damage is certainly under all circumstances likely to have been exaggerated by Shenoute and later sources, even if some blocks from the temple came to be reused at the White Monastery.

Disregarding the identification of the temple and the extent of any destruction that took place, Emmel places this episode in the aftermath of the destruction of the Serapeum

in Alexandria in 392.132

In another episode, Shenoute visited the village of Plewit.133 The villagers, sill ad-

hering to paganism, tried to prevent Shenoute from entering the village by the use of

magic, but he exposed their superstition and destroyed the idols in the local temple,

“smashing them one on top of the other.”134 The genre prescribes that Shenoute is the

sole protagonist in this story, yet it is obvious that he must have been supported by his monks in a confrontation such as this.135 And indeed Shenoute later appears to have

come under the accusation of the local authorities for practically being a ‘mob leader’.136

The trial that followed provided Shenoute with a speaker's platform to attack pagan

cults, but also shows that many of his anti-pagan activities were far from universally accepted.137 Nonetheless, from Shenoute's sermons, it is clear that his attack of the

sanctuary at Plewit may have been followed by further destruction of idols, notably at Koptos and Panopolis.138

Sometime around 400, Shenoute broke into the private house of a local aristocrat

named Gesios that Emmel has suggested was a 'crypto-pagan,' pretending to be a Chris-

tian in public while secretly following traditional paganism at home.139 This Gesios has been identified as Flavius Aelius Gessius, who was a former governor of the Thebais region, the southern part of Upper Egypt from Abydos to Aswan, and is thus an identi-

fiable historical figure.140 Besa gives the following account of the climax of the conflict when two monks accompanied Shenoute in a nighttime visit to the house of Gesios:

131 Quote from Emmel 2008: 163-164. Recent fieldwork: El-Sayed 2010. Reuse at the White Monastery: Klotz 2010.

132 Thus mirroring the observation of Theodoret that after the Serapeum's destruction, "all over the world the shrines of the idols were destroyed" (*Hist. eccl.* 5.22), cf. above, "Christian Responses to Pagan Images in Alexandria."

133 Besa, *Life of Shenoute*, 83-84; Shenoute, *De Idolis Vici Pleueit*, in *Opera* 50. On the identification of Plewit, see Amélineau 1973 [1893]: 359-360. Alternate spellings for the village's name are Pleueit and Pneueit. On Shenoute's visit, see Trombley 1995: II, 209-213; Frankfurter

2008b: 141-142, and the sceptical remarks of Smith 2002: 245-246 and Emmel 2008: 165, esp. n. 15.

134 Besa, *Life of Shenoute*, 84, trans. Bell.

135 Indeed, in Shenoute's introduction of his sermon *De Idolis Vici Pleueit*, it is clear that "many Christians had participated in the action and were now under indictment" (quoted from Trombley 1995: II, 210).

136 Emmel 2008: 163.

137 Trombley 1995: II, 210.

138 Leipoldt 1904: 175-182; Trombley 1995: II, 213.

139 On the 'Gesios affair' in general, see Frankfurter 1998: 77-82; Emmel 2002: 99-113; 2008: 167-181; Lundhaug 2010. On Gesios as a 'crypto-pagan': Emmel 2002: 108-111; 2008: 172-173.

140 Emmel 2002: 103.

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When they came to the pagans' door, the doors of the house opened immediately one after another until they entered the place where the idols were. So with the

brothers who were with him, he picked them up, took them down to the river,

smashed them in pieces and threw them in the river.141

The divine providence of Shenoute is stressed in several parts of the story. He is able to cross the Nile "without any ship or sailor," the doors of Gesios' house open by themselves, and the beasts of the night did not make a sound on the night of Shenoute's

attack, thus not alerting guards or the owner.142

In Shenoute's own account of the attack, he points to Jesus' assistance in his endeav-

our and gives some further information on the identity of the images that he finds in

Gesios' house, specifically Kronos, Hecate, Zeus, and "images of other demons."143 Of

interest is also his mention of "images of priests with shaven heads and altars in their hands, everything that was in the temples back when he whose memory is of good

repute, Theodosios the righteous emperor, had not given orders that they should be

laid waste."144 This information not only gives us a good indication of when the Ge-

sios episode took place, since refers to the reign of Theodosius in the past tense, it also shows that Shenoute had at least some knowledge of traditional Egyptian statues of

naophoric priests and other pagan images.145 Shenoute also points out that Gesios made sacrifices to his statues "by lighting a lot of lamps for them, and offering up incense to them on the altars, with what they call *kuphi*, and breaking bread before them."146

This testimony is similar to that encountered at Menouthis in the late fifth century and discussed above. In spite of these offenses demonstrating that

the idols were being used in worship, the destruction of the images does not feature in Shenoute's own account

of the Gesios incident, although it seems reasonable that this was their ultimate fate, especially considering Besa's later version of the events.

Shenoute strengthened his ecclesiastical authority and the standing of his monastery

by engaging in high-profile confrontations with local idol worship that were undoubt-

edly amplified in later renditions. Yet ultimately, Shenoute's primary motive was to

replace one system of representation with another, and he did not object to religious

141 Besa, *Life of Shenoute*, 126, trans. Bell.

142 Quote: Besa, *Life of Shenoute*, 125, trans. Bell. Doors open by themselves: Shenoute, *Let Our Eyes*, frag. 2.3, ed. Emmel. No beasts at night: Besa, *Life of Shenoute*, 127, ed. Bell.

143 Emmel 2008: 169-170. Quotation: Shenoute, *Let Our Eyes*, frag. 1.3, trans. Emmel. Shenoute also especially evokes the deceiving powers of oracular cult (*Let Our Eyes*, frag. 1.10, ed. Emmel.). On the use of images in oracular cults, see above, "Approaching Egypt."

144 Shenoute, *Let Our Eyes*, frag. 1.3, trans. Emmel.

145 The assemblage from Gesios' house also included a kind of Nilometer that originally must have come from a sanctuary (cf. ibid.: 170). It seems likely that at least part of this assemblage of pagan images came from a sanctuary. In another case, Shenoute identifies an image as Min, see Emmel 1994.

146 Shenoute, *Let Out Eyes*, frag. 1.21, trans. Emmel. On Peter's "trial," see above, "Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Alexandria's Hinterland."

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imagery per se. This is expressed clearly in a passage that also hints at his knowledge of the contemporary use of Horus *cippi* (discussed above) and other forms of healing images covered in hieroglyphs:

If previously it is prescriptions for murdering man's soul that are in there, written

with blood and not with ink alone – [indeed,] there is nothing else portrayed…

except the likeness of the snakes and scorpions, the dogs and cats, the crocodiles

and frogs,…where these are, it is the soul-saving scriptures of life that will hence-

forth come to be in there…and His son Jesus Christ and all his Angels, righteous

men and saints [will be portrayed on these walls].147

Such representations of righteous men and saints are exactly what we find in some of

the churches that were constructed in Egyptian temples, such as Karnak (see below),

and also in Shenoute's recently recovered funerary chapel at the White Monastery.

In the sermons of Besa, Shenoute's successor at the White Monastery, idols are

mostly mentioned in the general sense, although he makes reference to a village where

locals "fight with one another for naught over a piece of wood," indicating continued

controversy over pagan images.148 In other passages, he exercised the traditional topoi

of man-made images:

If you would not ever call idols blessed which are set up in temples – sticks and

stones with no spirit in them, but set fast with nails and other kinds of manu-

factured things, and when anyone moves them, they will collapse –, then which

angel from God shall call you blessed…But you are set fast upon manufactured

words and empty things, and when anyone moves you, you will collapse and be

cast to the ground by the demons who deceive and mock you, whereas it is fitting

that you should mock them.149

The passage is interesting in its juxtaposition of idols and sinners, as the fall of the former foreshadows the destruction of the latter. Demons feature heavily in Besa's writings, especially as the henchmen of the devil and tempters of sinners, yet they are not linked to pagan temples or images.150 Besa's account of the fall of idols may build on 147 Quoted

from Frankfurter 1998: 265. See Young 1981 for the first publication of this fragmentary text.

148 Quote: Besa, *Letters and Sermons*, Codex F, frag. 41.I.2, trans. Kuh n. On this controversy and its social context, refer to Frankfurter 2000a; 2008b: 141. The critical view of this episode in Smith 2002: 247 and his opinion that the object of argument was indeed nothing but a piece of wood seems unjustified. As seen in the case of the Alexandrian Serapeum and the story of Apollo at Hermopolis, it was common practice to refer to pagan cult statues as pieces of wood.

149 Besa, *Letters and Sermons*, Codex C, frag. 36.II.7-8, trans. Kuh n.

150 See Besa, *Letters and Sermons*, index, “Demons.” However, in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*,

idolatry is directly linked to the sin of fornication (*Lot*, 2, p. 122, ed. Ward). On Shenoute and demons, refer to Van der Vliet 1992.

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his monastic community’s collective memory of the iconoclastic acts of Shenoute or his own experiences (see below). They furthermore demonstrate how the topoi of idolatry

could be employed to enforce religious codes.

Looking closer at another Christian text concerning the destruction of pagan images,

the *Panegyric on Macarius of Tkôw*, casts some further shadows over the credibility of such sources. The text dates to the sixth century while glorifying the acts of the bishop Macarius, who lived in the fifth

century.151 In its fifth chapter, readers are introduced to a village in the region of Tkôw (modern Qaw el-Kebir) where the inhabitants worshipped an otherwise unknown god called Kothos in the later part of the fifth century

and not long after the death of Shenoute.152 Images of Kothos were present both in

niches in their houses and in the village's temples. The crimes of the local pagan community are dramatically presented in a passage that crosses into caricature. The pagan priests seemingly sacrificed Christian children to their god, and made harps of their

intestines on which they sung hymns honouring Kothos.153 The story then tells us that

the ashes of pagan children were used by the pagans to locate hidden treasures. While it is unlikely that these stories reflect any historical reality of the fifth century, it may well give an idea of the nature of the rumours that could develop in the context of religious polarization.154 There is likewise little reason to doubt that images could be worshipped both in the domestic and sacred spheres of an Upper Egyptian village in the fifth century.155 Indeed, I have already discussed similar images in the context of Shenoute (in the house of Gesios) and of Menouthis outside Alexandria at roughly the same date.

Having set the scene for the intervention of the hero, Macarius enters the story as

he made his way to the temple of Kothos alongside two priests.156 In spite of armed

resistance, Macarius gained entry only to be taken captive by the pagans who proceeded to make preparations to sacrifice him and his companions, when none other than Besa,

Shenoute's biographer, came to the rescue. The story then reaches its climax:

Father Besa said to my father [Macarius]: ‘Do one of these two things. Either pray,

and I will set the fire, or set the fire, and I will pray.’ My father said: ‘No. Rather, 151 On the theological and social context of the *Panegyric on Macarius*, see Frankfurter 2007.

152 It has been suggested that Kothos is to be equated with Agathos Daimon, a deity of civic fortune that in turn was equated with the Egyptian god Shai in Upper Egypt, cf. Frankfurter 2007: 178-179.

153 *Panegyric on Macarius of Tkôw*, V.1-2. See Frankfurter 2008a: 20-21 on this passage’s reliance on topoi and constructions of the Other. For a similar Christian construction of “barbarian” child sacrifice, see Pseudo-Nilus, *Narrations*, 3.2.

154 For further comments on the historical value of the *Panegyric on Macarius*, see Frankfurter 2007, concluding that “the Panegyric provides a priceless picture, authentic in many details, of persisting Egyptian religion and perhaps of the historical cult of Shai” (p. 188).

155 On the religious use of images in Egyptian domestic contexts, refer to Frankfurter 1998: 132-136.

156 *Panegyric on Macarius of Tkôw*, V.4-5.

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let us pray together, and the fire will come down from heaven and consume this temple’.157

Macarius and Besa’s prayers were heard, and the temple duly burnt down in an act

of divine intervention. In the aftermath, Macarius visited the local village of Kothos-worshippers. There, the high priest of the cult, named Homer, was burnt on a bonfire

alongside 306 idols recovered from the houses of the village. Of the inhabitants we are told that while some fled the village altogether, others were baptized, testimony once again to the genre of idol destruction followed by conversion.158 The panegyric's climax of invoking fire from heaven effectively recognizes Macarius as a new Elijah, thus enforcing his religious authority.159 The story itself builds on several topoi, such as the presence of paganism in the countryside (always a locus of alterity), rumours of human sacrifice, and pagan challenges to a Christian protagonist. Its primary value is in understanding the construction of a particular kind of narrative of religious confrontation, rather than as evidence of historical events.

A final and late written account of Christian violent responses to pagan images and

temples is found in the *Vita* of Moses of Abydos.160 The fragmentary text, dating to the sixth or seventh century, gives an account of events taking place around 500.161 The structure of a passage regarding an idol of "Bes" is strikingly similar to that of Macarius'

visit to the village of the Kothos worshippers.162 Frankfurter has suggested an identification of the "Bes" temple as the Osireion at Abydos, but it seems more likely to be a room inside the Temple of Sethos I.163 Moses entered the temple with seven monks

and succeeded in exorcising the demonic idol after a night of prayers. The resistance of the idol is narrated in dramatic detail in an account where the idol roars like a bull and shakes the ground beneath the protagonists.164 We may question the historical accuracy of this rather fanciful story of exorcism with seemingly cosmological repercussions (which is not unlike how the image of Alexandrian Serapis was perceived). Indeed the story

finds a close parallel in the legend of Thekla battling demons in a temple at Seleukia before being able to claim it for herself.165 It thus relied

heavily on a well-established Christian tradition of demonology.

Dijkstra has commented that the various Christian sources discussed above “should

be approached as literary works, written with an ideological agenda, which say some-

157 *Panegyric on Macarius of Tkôw*, V.9, trans. Joh nson.

158 See Chapter 1, ‘Why Did Christians Destroy Pagan Sculpture?’

159 Frankfurter 2008b: 151. On Elijah, see Frankfurter 1993: esp. 68-69.

160 An English translation of the *Vita* is available in Moussa 2003: 75-89. On Moses, see also Grossmann 1999.

161 Frankfurter 2008b: 136; 151-152.

162 *Moyses*, pp. 71-72, ed. Till. Moses also succeeds in destroying (through prayer) a temple of Apollo and four other sanctuaries at Abydos (see Moussa 2003: 79-81).

163 Frankfurter 2008b: 152; and see below, “Christians and the Pagan Past at Abydos and Dendara.”

164 *Moyses*, p. 72, ed. Till.

165 Saradi 1990: 54.

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thing about how a Christian author and his public looked back from a contemporary perspective on a ‘pagan’ past and explained it from that perspective rather than describing actual events.”166 However, it is clear that there is a difference in the viewpoints of these stories. While some purport to be eyewitness accounts (notably Shenoute),

others (for example, Moses of Abydos) give much later accounts of what may at the

time already have been quasi-mythical or even entirely fictitious events. Yet at the core of both varieties of sources is a concern over the power of images, how they were used in religious practices, and the dangers that they posed to local communities. Regardless of the historical accuracy of these accounts they must have appeared as credible

both to those who wrote them down and those who read or listened to them. Many of

these texts were written with a specifically local audience in mind and they thus sought to account for and explain the local religious environment and its history.167 In spite of their heavy use of topoi in the construction of triumphal narratives, it seems clear that confrontations over images played a key role in the Christianization of the Nile

Valley, and that a variety of responses took part in the construction of a new social

and religious order. Stories such as that of Moses of Abydos’ visit to the oracle of “Bes”

certainly give some insight into how early Christian communities could conceptualize

the power of (pagan) images at a time when many such images would still have been

visible in Egyptian temples.

It is furthermore clear that the Christian destruction of pagan images features in

symbolically charged triumphal performances, often closely linked to stories of conversion, such as in the case of Apollo of Hermopolis; thus they are connected to one of the major themes of Christian idol destruction that was identified in the previous chapter.

As Frankfurter has remarked, it is characteristic of several of these accounts that they emphasize the spectacle of iconoclasm and the minutiae of the conflict.168 We see this especially in the story of the Temple of Kothos. From one perspective, accounts of the destruction of images could be seen as part of a standard repertoire of what an Egyptian holy man simply was required to do to acquire a particular status – or at least what was required of their literary personae.

After Apollo and Shenoute's examples, such confrontations featured in hagiogra-

phies as a conventional topos. The righteousness of following in Shenoute's anti-pagan footsteps through destruction of idols and temples is, for example, directly evoked in Moses of Abydos' *Vita*.169 Yet it is also clear that the protagonists in these stories demonstrate dualistic and conflicting concepts of images. To them, images were simultane-

ously inanimate objects, as was conventionally argued in Christian texts, and demonic

idols with supernatural powers, as can be seen in Moses' and Macarius' battles with

Bes and Kothos respectively. Turning now to the archaeology of the Nile Valley allows

166 Dijkstra 2008: 93.

167 Dijkstra 2008: 253-269; and see above, "Rhetoric and Reality in Christian Texts."

168 Frankfurter 2008b: 154; and see further discussion below, “Idols on Trial: Representation and Corporal Punishment.”

169 Moussa 2003: 73.

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us to compare these early Christian narratives with the extent and physical context of Christian responses to particular images. What does the archaeological evidence tell us about how early Christians perceived pagan images in this region?

Christians and the Pagan Past at Abydos and Dendara

Abydos features in the early Christian literature on the conversion of temples and

the destruction of idols, such as in the story of Moses. Due to the site’s importance

in Egyptian history and mythology, extensive excavations have taken place there and

many important religious buildings with a long and complicated afterlife of reuse have been recovered. This material facilitates comparison between the account of Moses and

the actual state of images at Abydos.170 Do the responses that we can gather from this evidence confirm, modify, or even entirely disprove the story of Moses and his followers?

Abydos was the holy city of Osiris who traditionally was believed to have been buried

there. It was also the burial place of several early dynastic rulers. Abydos subsequently became an important centre of pilgrimage, and several graffiti from the Greek and

Roman periods attest to the continuity of these visits.171 The site's popularity in the Roman period has been explained with reference to the existence of an oracle of Bes

that was housed in the so-called Osiris Complex, an unusual ensemble of rooms at

the back of the Temple of Sethos I (Fig. 2.14).172 There is a concentration of mutilated relief images in this part of the temple, which has been suggested to some scholars that the oracular cult was still active into the fourth and fifth centuries.173 Either way, it is clear from Moses' encounter with the idol of Bes discussed above that this place was

still considered to hold a special, albeit demonic, power that needed to be exorcised.

Unfortunately, our knowledge of the nature of the Christian use of the site is fairly

limited. The majority of the evidence that we have consists of a series of Coptic graffiti in the Temple of Sethos I.174 Half of these come from one particular room in the

temple's southern annexe (Room Z). The vast majority of the graffiti in the Temple of

Sethos I was written by or for women, suggesting that the temple may have served as a

nunnery, presumably with its own church located in one of the rooms of the temple.175

The latest date that can be reasonably inferred from the graffiti is within the range of 910 and 921.176 In the Osireion, which Frankfurter suggests

was the scene of Moses’

struggle with the demonic Bes, a number of Christian graffiti were also discovered during 170 On Abydos, refer to Murray 1904; Frankfort 1933 (both on the Osirieion); Porter & Moss 1939: 1-41 (bibliographical overview); Piankoff 1960 (on Greco-Roman and late antique Abydos); David 1981; Wilkinson 2000: 143-148; O’Connor 2009.

171 On these graffiti, refer to Murray 1904: 35-38; Perdrizet & Lefebvre 1919; Piankoff 1960: 125ff.

172 Murray 1904: 35-36; Perdrizet & Lefebvre 1919: xix–xxiii; Dunand 1997; Frankfurter 1998: 169-174.

173 Frankfurter 1998: 173-174; 2008b: 149; 152. Ammianus Marcellinus also mentions the oracle of Bes at Abydos in connection with its apparent closure in 359 (19.12.3; and see Frankfurter 2000b).

174 Studied by Walter Crum in Murray 1904: 38-43.

175 Murray 1904: 38.

176 Murray 1904: 41-42, no. B 11; Piankoff 1960: 131.

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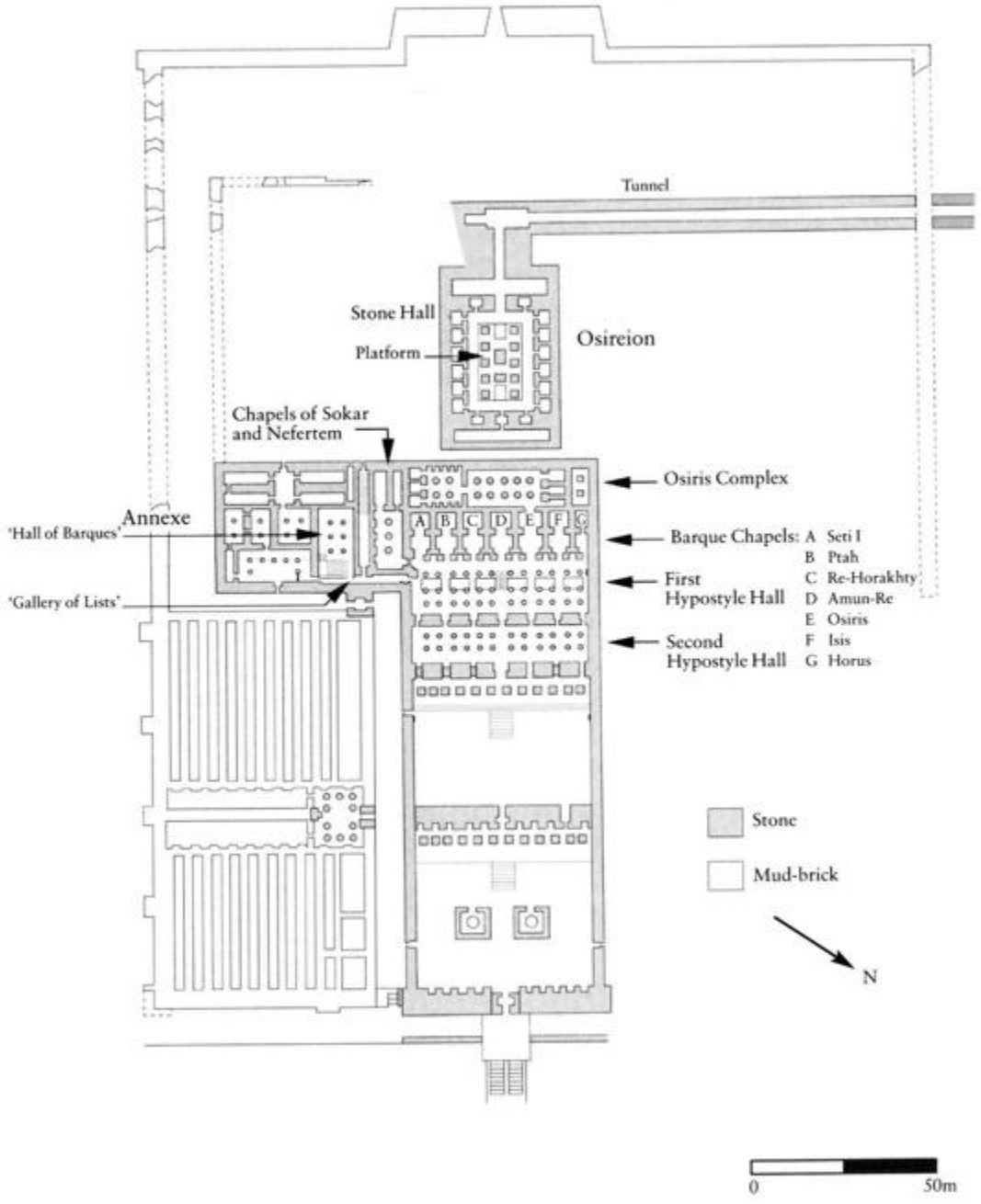

Plan of the Temple of Sethos I at Abydos (courtesy of David O'Connor).

Fig. 2.14.

excavations in the 1920s, but part of this evidence has unfortunately since been lost.177

It seems that even though the Osireion was used for some Christian purpose during

177 Unfortunately, the report by T. Whittemore on the Coptic material from the Osireion, promised in the final publication (Frankfort 1933), was lost during the war. Since then, the majority of the graffiti has faded away, cf. Piankoff 1960, who reports on what was left in his time. In this report's mention of the Coptic reuse of certain blocks for millstones, Frankfort made the following statement that demonstrates his own assessment of this period in Egypt's history: "We may merely The Semantics of Christian Response

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Late Antiquity, no images on its walls were destroyed.178 The Osireion was not long after given over for use as a quarry, and spoliated blocks from the building were reused in a seventh- or early eighth-century loom factory roughly 1 km south of Abydos.179

This could suggest that Room Z is the more likely candidate for the place where Moses

exorcised the demon of Bes.

How did this community of nuns respond to the pagan images around them? Looking

at individual scenes in the Temple of Sethos I, we are able to observe a wide variety of responses. Many scenes have escaped mutilation entirely, including some in the most

accessible parts of the temple, such as the Hypostyle Halls. In a few cases, faces, hands, and feet have been singled out for mutilation.180 On the western side of the Second

Hypostyle Hall there are seven small finely decorated chapels (A-G), each dedicated to a different divinity.181 Several scenes have been disfigured; heads, hands, and feet have been specifically targeted.

An interesting case of mutilation of figures can be observed in the First Osiris Hall, immediately behind the seven small chapels. Here, in one of the lower registers, in a

scene depicting Isis and the king touching the Abydene Symbol in the shape of a column with a capital with a representation of the king, the faces, arms, and legs of all figures have been thoroughly destroyed (Fig. 2.15).182 The upper part of the body of Isis has

also received extensive damage. An interesting difference in the treatment of particular representations is that the feet of Isis have been hacked away, whereas the damage to

the legs of the king is more or less limited to the tibias. The two kneeling figures have only been hit by a few blows to the heads, knees, and feet. I shall return to the potential significance of this phenomenon below, but it is important that this kind of selective destruction seems to have been regarded as fulfilling whatever purpose the attackers

had in mind. Perhaps somewhat ironically, the Abydene Symbol that in its time had

been worshipped as a representation of the god was not defaced or otherwise mutilated.

This shows that the Christians who may have been responsible for the mutilation of

the other figures in this case were not intimately familiar with the specificities of the cult and its visual practices. It may be that they perceived this bust-like depiction in a rather different manner from the life-size depictions of Isis and the king.

Turning to the decoration of the Osiris Complex at large, it is predominantly faces,

state now the evidence which showed us that the Copts were here, as elsewhere, the destroyers of what their betters had created in the past" (1933: 33).

178 Piankoff 1960: 130. The prevalence of depictions of ships among the graffiti may suggest that the Osireion was used as a Christian funerary monument (on the ship graffiti, see pp. 137-144).

179 Farag 1983: 51-52.

180 See e.g. Second Hypostyle Hall, West Wall, between Chapels of Ptah and Sethos, Lower and Upper Scenes (Calverley 1968: pls. 30-31).

181 The reliefs in the seven chapels are published in Calverley 1933; 1935.

182 First Osiris Hall, West Wall, Lower Register 12 (Calverley 1938: pl. 6), cf. David 1981: 138, commenting that "the figures are well-preserved, except for the face, arms and legs of the king and Isis which were mutilated, probably by the Christians, with a pronged instrument, unlike the other damage in the temple." On the Abydene Symbol, refer to David 1997: 109.

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Mutilated scene in the Temple of Sethos I, Abydos (photo: author).

Fig. 2.15.

feet, and to a lesser degree hands that have been hacked away. In many reliefs where

hands have been hit, they have been targeted with less intensity than other mutilated

body parts. Occasionally complete figures have been destroyed.183 However, in the three small shrines of Isis, Osiris, and Horus within the Osiris Complex, many scenes have

escaped destruction altogether.184 We thus see a wide variety of responses that may have had different meanings and may have been carried out at different times.

At Abydos, it is also possible to identify different methods of mutilation even within 183 See e.g. Calverley 1938: pl. 16, lower middle relief (Inner/First Osiris Hall, East Wall, Fourth Section from North).

184 Shrine of Horus: Calverley 1938: pls. 31-34. Shrine of Sethos: Calverley 1938: pls. 35-42. Shrine of Isis: Calverley 1938: pls. 43-46.

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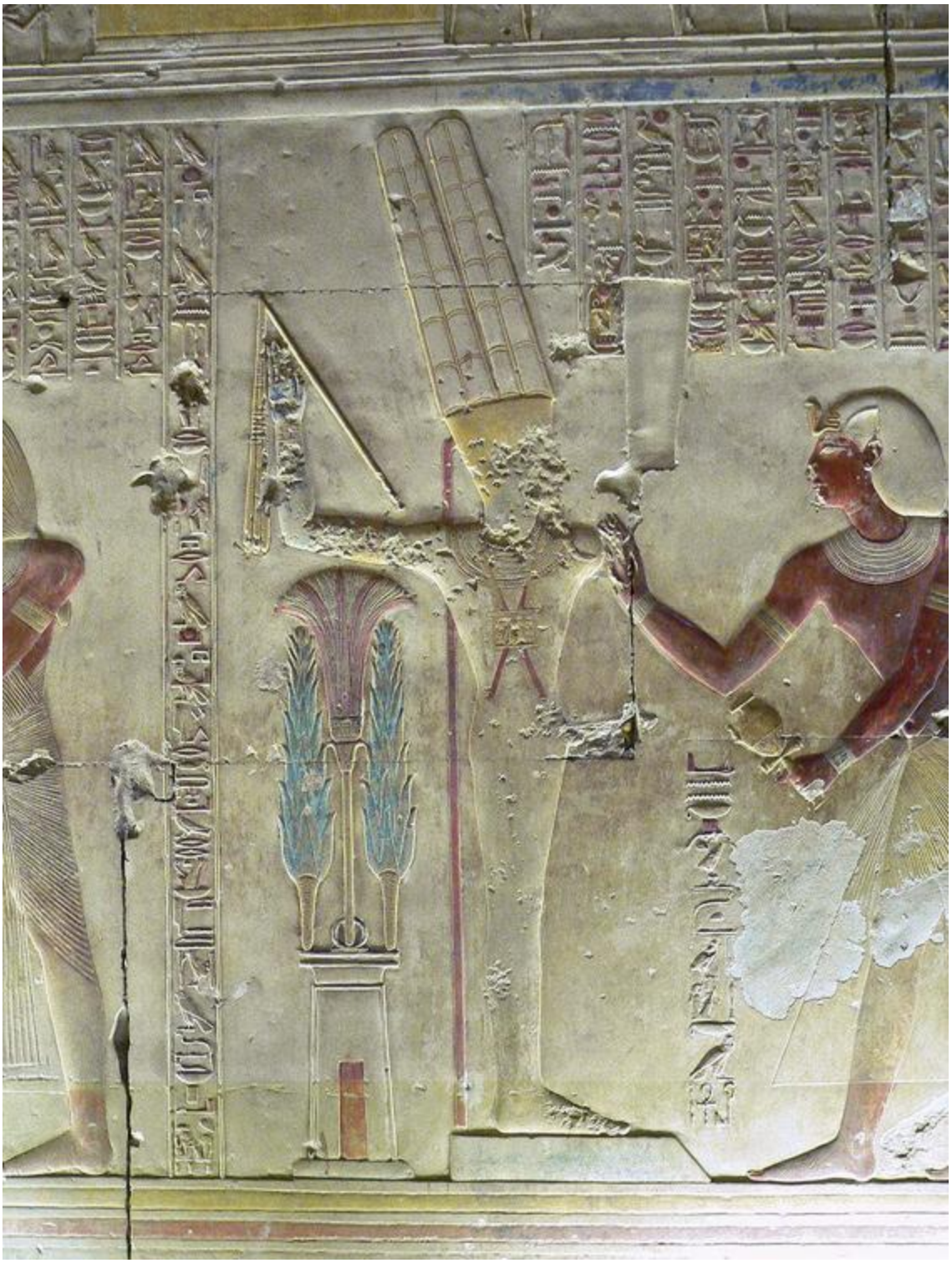

Fig. 2.16. *Mutilated scene in the Temple*

of Sethos I, Abydos (photo:

author).

the same scenes. In one scene in the First Osiris Hall, for example, the king has been rather haphazardly hit on almost all parts of his body, whereas the figure of a goddess has been mutilated by a series of oblong slits.185 Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in some scenes where the head has been targeted repeatedly, distinct features such as the eyes, which were often the primary target in a medium such as sculpture in the round

are still clearly visible.186 In other scenes in the Temple of Sethos I, *phalli* have been hacked away (Fig. 2.16), although there are cases in which the head of Min has been

smashed but the *phallus* is untouched.187 In general, the destruction of images at Abydos appears to be rather *ad hoc* and cannot be dated to one specific phase of the temple's history (or the campaign of Moses for that matter). There is no evidence that points

to a systematic and targeted programme of destruction which can be connected to the

185 Calverley 1938: pl. 5, lower left relief (Inner/First Osiris Hall, North Wall, Entrance to Isis Shrine).

186 See e.g. Calverley 1938: pl. 15, lower right corner (Inner Osiris Hall, East Wall, Third Section from South). In this relief the legs, hands, and face of the king have been extensively mutilated, but the eyes and nose are still clearly visible, even though they have been struck a few times.

187 Two examples in Calverley 1938: pl. 3 (Inner/First Osiris Hall, North Wall, Entrance to Horus Shrine).

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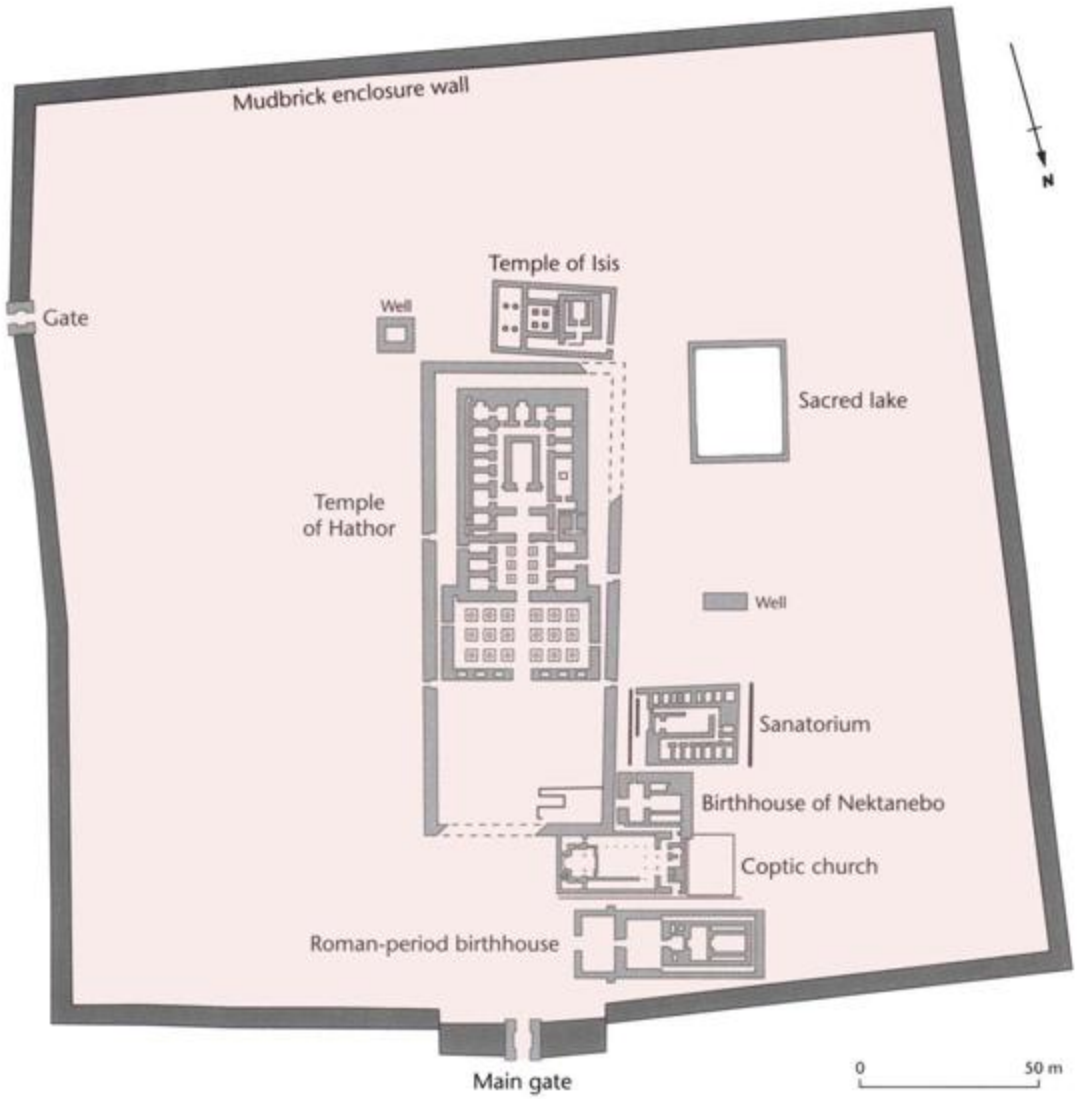

Map of the Dendara temple complex (after Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 211, Fig. 8.2.2).

Fig. 2.17.

conversion of the temple. The nunnery's appropriation of the sacred spaces of Abydos

furthermore appears to have been indifferent to a large part of the temples' images, even if in a number of cases selective destruction of images took place. It is unfortunate that our knowledge of the architectural layout of the Christian phases is so limited that we cannot contextualize this further.

Dendara (Greek-Roman Tentyra) represents an interesting contrast to Abydos in

the responses that can be observed there (Fig. 2.17).188 Not only is the Christian ap-

propriation of this important sanctuary of Hathor, some 90 km south of Abydos, better

understood since it has left behind monumental architecture, but we also see destruc-

188 On Dendara, refer to Chassinat et al. 1934-2007 (on the Temple of Hathor); Porter & Moss 1939: 41-110 (bibliography); Daumas 1957 (on the sanatorium); 1959 (on the two *mammisi*); Timm 1984: 543-548 (on Dendara during the Coptic and Islamic periods); Arnold 1999: 212-216; Hölbl 2000: 72-87; Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 209-214.

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tion on a much larger scale. In fact, Dendara recently featured prominently in Sauer's study of "religious hatred" as a hotbed of "fundamentalist" Christian iconoclasm, since a very large proportion of its sculptural decoration, both on the interior and exterior of the temple, has been mutilated in an unusually thorough fashion.189 Consideration

of a number of late antique features modifies this view of Christian "fundamentalist"

destruction and points to a more ambivalent view of the pagan past among the Chris-

tian communities that were present at the site. It is, for example, notable that when the Triconch church was constructed in the early sixth century, it followed the alignment

(and ground level) of the pre-Christian chapels outside the Temple of Hathor.190 The

location of the church, so close to the earlier temple, hints at a kind of sacred continuity and a recognition of the power of place that Dendara had held earlier; it is as such a contrast to the violent responses to the images in the temples, highlighted in Sauer's study. It is also worth pointing out that the ground level of the church is similar to that of the temple, showing that there had not been significant neglect or disrepair before the sixth century.

As Abydos, Dendara was also an important site of pilgrimage. This is clearly demon-

strated by the facilities provided in a mudbrick building immediately west of the Temple of Hathor known as the sanatorium.191 The sanatorium dates to the early Roman period

and was equipped with a hydraulic system that included a number of bath tub-like

basins. This elaborate system provided water that had passed over a *stela* inscribed with healing spells.192 Around the sanatorium's inner courtyard was a series of small rooms that allowed visitors to sleep in the presence of the goddess, similar to the incubation halls of Asklepios at Pergamon, Epidauros, and elsewhere. Each of the small rooms had

a niche for the display of a sacred, healing image.193 In other parts of the sanctuary, special cult areas and images were accessible for popular devotion, such as a large head of Hathor, originally gilded, on the south wall of the temple.194 Two fountains dating to the second or third century and decorated with niches (for now lost bronze statues) were located just outside the North Gate, providing water for the bodily purification

of worshippers before they entered the sanctuary proper.195

By the early fourth century, Dendara had become a bishopric, and the Roman-period

birth house was converted to a church during this time.196 A number of crosses con-

centrated in the area around the building's undecorated southern doorway may date to

this period (Fig. 2.18).197 These crosses may have served a similar function to the many 189 Sauer 2003: 89-101.

190 On the Triconch church, refer to Grossmann 2002a: 443-446; McKenzie 2007: 282-283.

191 Daumas 1957.

192 Daumas 1957: 41-49; Frankfurter 1998b: 48.

193 Daumas 1957: 49.

194 Discussed in Frankfurter 1998: 51-52; 2008a: 661-662.

195 On these fountains, refer to Cassel, Dunand, & Golvin 1984.

196 On Christian Dendara, see Timm 1984: 543-548.

197 Daumas 1959: pl. LIV bis.

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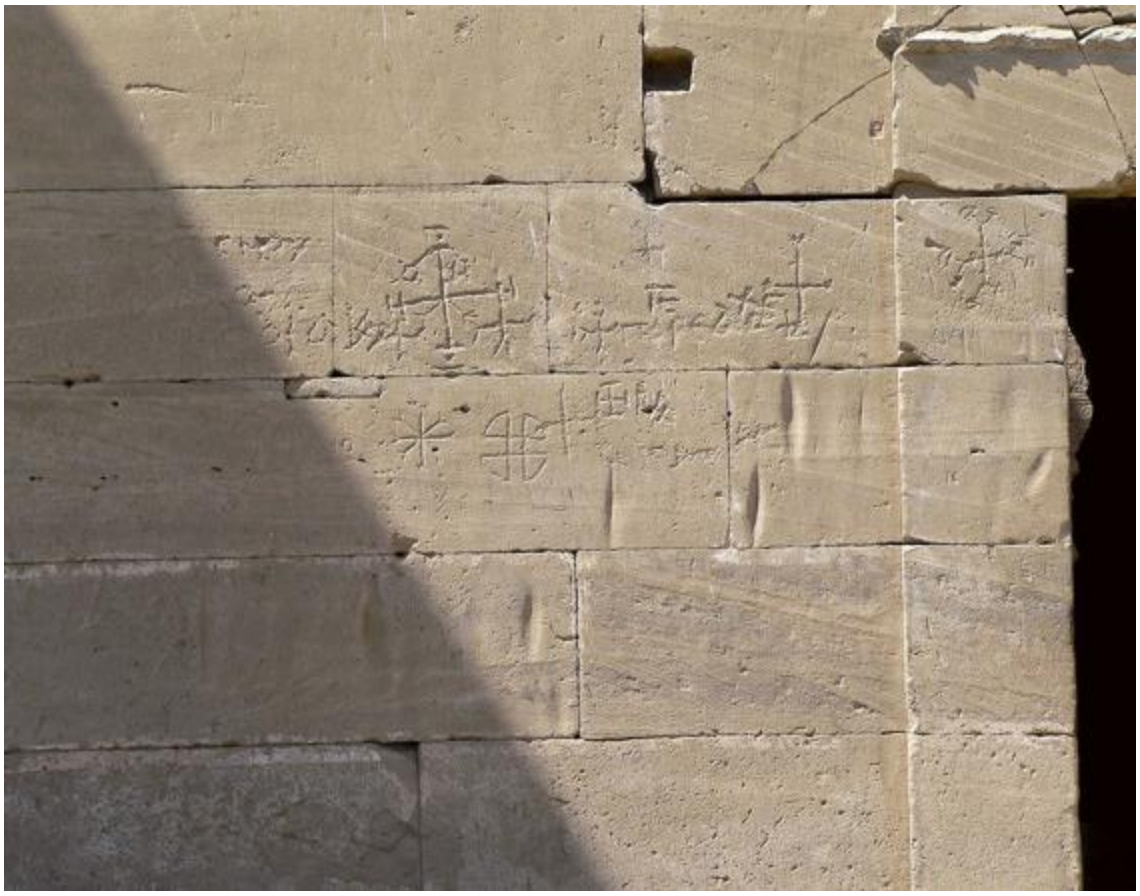

Crosses on the Roman birth house at Dendara (photo: author).

Fig. 2.18.

crosses near doorways at other such sites, which is unsurprising given that such openings and gateways were often considered to be dangerous and occupied by evil spirits.198 The rather haphazard placement of the crosses may indicate that they were connected to

popular devotion and worship rather than rituals of exorcism. Further evidence for the emergence of a Christian religious landscape in the region of Dendara is provided by the monastery that was founded by Apa Juba in the vicinity of the town.199 Written sources attest to a number of notable church figures that were present here up until the middle of the 14th century, after which the site appears to slowly have lost its importance.200

As observed by Sauer, a very large number of the pagan images at Dendara were

mutilated during this process of Christianizing the site.201 The destructive efforts are 198 19th-century eth nographies of Egypt reveal that similar beliefs existed in much later periods about the dwelling places of *ginns* or evil spirits at thresholds of doors and gates, see Klunzinger 1878: 389-390.

199 Timm 1984: 544.

200 Timm 1984: 546. Interestingly, the site was still known by Coptic Christians in the 17th century as the “temple of the idols.”

201 Sauer 2003: 89-101. Considering the quick build-up of sand inside the temple, Sauer notes that reliefs located at all heights have been mutilated, indicating a late antique date (p. 99).

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Fig. 2.19. *Mutilated Hathor capital*,

Dendara (photo: author).

noteworthy for their intensity and thorough ness in comparison with what can be ob-

served at Abydos and many other Egyptian temples. The Christian image-breakers at

Dendara made an unusually comprehensive effort to erase many figures completely, most

famously the colossal heads of Hathor that decorated the capitals of the hypostyle hall at a height of some 10 m or so above the floor (Fig. 2.19).202 The destruction of these heads, and the effort it must have required to reach each of them, is well illustrated by a reconstruction drawing in Sauer's book that shows Christians on very high ladders,

armed with pick-axes. The remorseless destruction of complete figures is evident both

inside and on the exterior walls of the temple.203 In some rooms, all figural representa-202 Sauer 2003: 89-91. The original appearance of the Hathor capitals in the hypostyle hall is reconstructed in Arnold 1992: 64. For full photographic documentation of the destruction of the capitals, refer to Chassinat 1934a: pls. 32-36.

203 Some examples of destruction inside the temple: Daumas 1987 (Chamber Z, north wall, third register, relief I & II (pl. 838)); Cauville 2000 (Chamber E', doorway, south side (pl. 50); Chamber E', interior frame, lintel (pl. 53); Chamber E', first register, north wall, relief III (pl. 59); Chamber E', second register, north wall, relief I (pl. 60); Chamber E', second register, north wall, reliefs I

& II (pl. 61); Chamber E', first register, south wall, relief II (pl. 69); Chamber E', first register, **154**

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tions on the reliefs were completely defaced.204 This extent of destruction is paralleled in some other temples in the region, such as the Temple of Triphis at Atripe, where

Hathor capitals similar to those found in Dendara have been treated in an identical

fashion.205

The case of Dendara is unique because it is one of the few sites where the *instrumenta* of Christian destruction have been considered carefully – that is the practicalities of how different images were destroyed, mutilated, or for very practical reasons left unscathed.

Sauer has considered the specific tools used to mutilate images, which were small and

required the bearer to make repeated strikes to destroy an entire image.206 This may

be explained by the fact that it would be difficult to manage larger tools at this height.

Sauer imagines Christians “standing frequently over 4, sometimes 10m above the ground, grasping with one hand the ladder and with the other their smallish iron tool, which

is raining down on the images at the wall with monotonous regularity.”207 This is a

powerful image, demonstrating a specific view of the dedication of the early Christian image-breakers and likening their actions to the Taliban destruction of the Bamiyan

Buddhas, albeit without the explosives.208

Sauer shows that in some cases, the destruction of images stopped at heights over 2 m, which were simply out of reach for people standing on the ground.209 In other cases, he suggests that even when ladders were used to reach some figures, others went unharmed

because they could not be reached from the positions of the ladders.210 The decoration of the temple's crypts, today one of the highlights of any visit and where the latent cult images were originally stored, escaped mutilation entirely, since they had been sealed by south wall, relief III (pl. 70); Chamber E', second register, south wall, relief III (pl. 72); Chamber E', second register, eastern wall (pl. 72); Chamber E', third register, south wall, relief II (pl. 75)) and Sauer 2003: 92, fig. 48; 93, fig. 49; 98, fig. 54. Some examples of destruction on the exterior walls of the temple: Cauville 2007 (exterior of *naos* H', south wall, east side, base (pl. 6); exterior of *naos* H', east wall, first register, reliefs IX & X (pl. 62); exterior of *naos* H', east wall, second register, relief VII (pl. 70); exterior of *naos* H', east wall, base, figs. 45-48 (pl. 117)). In some scenes on the exterior façade, there is evidence of a different practice of destruction from the usual multi-chiselling approach that can be seen in most of the temple's relief (see exterior of *naos* H', east wall, first register, relief IV, cf. Cauville 2007: pl. 131).

204 E.g. the New Year Chapel, or *ouabit* (Chamber S), cf. Chassinat 1935b: pls. 302-310.

205 El-Sayed 2000: Taf. 96, Abb. 7.

206 Sauer 2003: 91-93. See also Brand's discussion of Coptic destruction at Luxor where top registers were not affected (2000: 95).

207 Sauer 2003: 93. The vast majority of images that have been mutilated at Dendara do indeed appear to have been targeted by a pointed iron instrument. However, in Chamber P (north wall, third register) at least one figure appears to have been targeted by a knife (focusing on face, hands, and feet), cf. Chassinat 1935b: pls. 281-282.

208 This comparison is explicitly made in a later chapter of Sauer's book, entitled "A past phenomenon or future threat?" (2003: 160-163).

209 Sauer 2003: 91; 95, fig. 51.

210 Sauer 2003: 94, fig. 50 (=Chamber D, north wall, third register, in Chassinat 1934b: pl. 112); 96, fig. 52.

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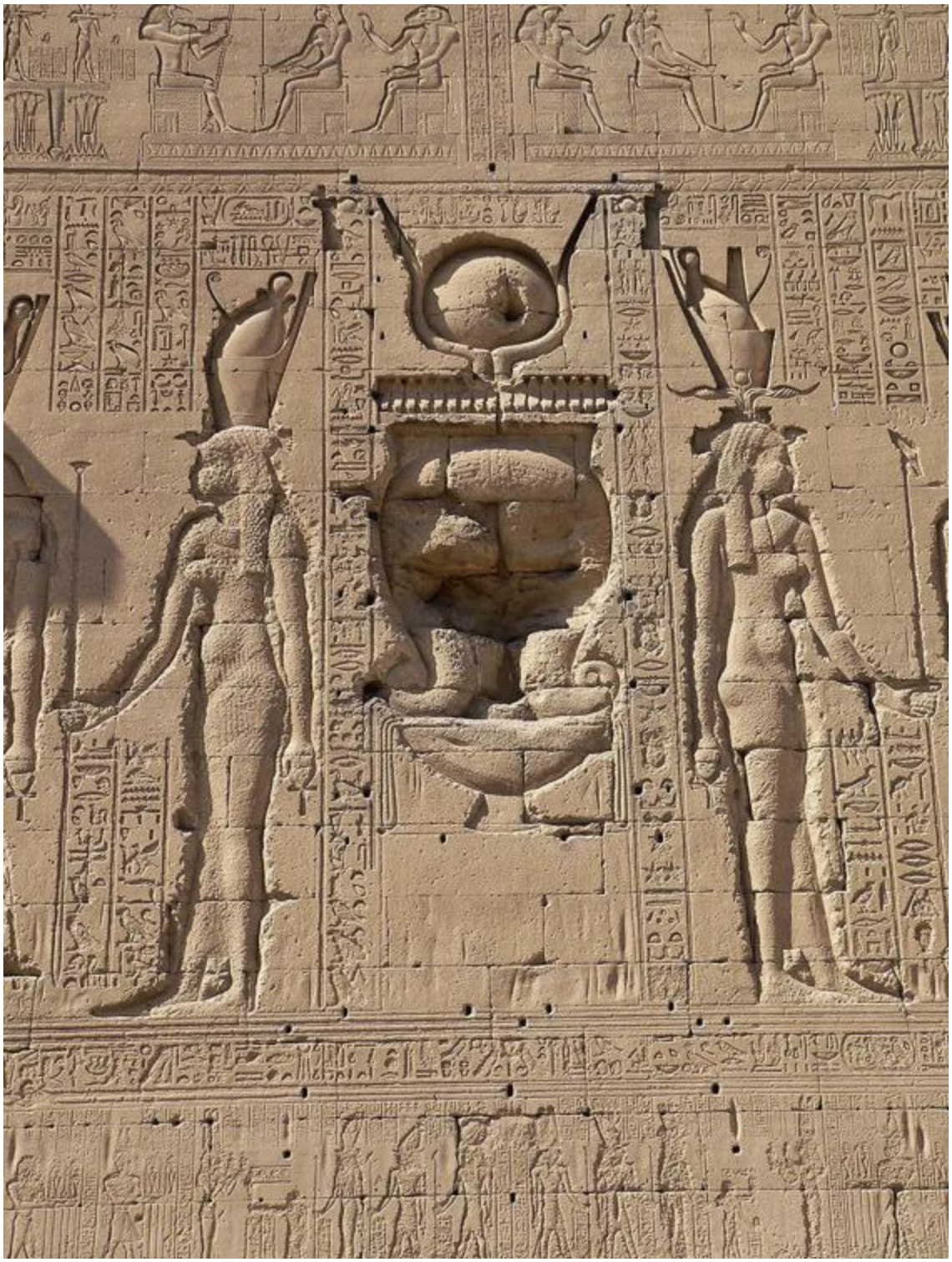

Fig. 2.20. *Colossal head of Hathor on the southern façade of her temple*

at Dendara (photo: author).

a brick wall at some date before the Christian conversion of the temple.211 Perhaps due to their remote location at the very back of the temple, some rooms avoided Christian

destruction completely.212 It is also a distinct possibility that rooms were blocked off or sealed during the Christian phases of reuse, and were thus inaccessible for potential attackers. These are all very pragmatic explanations for why some images in the temples

were destroyed whilst others were not, or were harmed to a lesser extent.

Sauer's careful analysis of the treatment of individual reliefs gives some fascinating insights into the logistics of destruction in Egyptian temples, but these are not enough to explain the diverse treatment of images within the Temple of Hathor. We see, for

instance, many examples similar to those at Abydos where specific body parts – mainly

feet, hands, and heads – were targeted. In Chamber E', a side chamber accessible from

211 Sauer 2003: 100. For full documentation of the decoration of crypts, see Chassinat 1947; Chassinat & Daumas 1965.

212 E.g. the images in two rooms (Chambers I and N) in the far southeastern corner and far southwestern corner respectively went completely unscathed (with very few exceptions), see Chassinat 1935a: pls. 169-176 (Room I); 1935b: pls. 250-270. These rooms were only accessible through other chapels (Room M and H).

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the Hall of Appearances (Chamber Z), among the lowest reliefs on the walls only the top half of figures have been mutilated, perhaps indicating that sand had built up to

that level at the time of the destruction.213 Yet in the first register of reliefs in this room, it is the faces, torsos, and legs that have been targeted, demonstrating that these body parts were singled out for having a particular potency or importance.214 As Sauer himself notes, heads were in many cases the main target of the image-breakers.215 Nowhere is

this more evident than in the extremely thorough destruction of the large Hathor head

that was the centre of popular devotion on the temple's southern façade (Fig. 2.20).216

Where there was once a very large bas-relief, there is now is a deep depression in the wall. The treatment of the images right next to the head is much more diverse, and

many were not targeted at all. In terms of Traunecker's classification of divine images, this head must have been a very powerful component of the "culte manifesté"; we know

this because of the intensity of the Christian response.

Another level in this hierarchy of destruction can be identified which in turn has

bearing on how we should interpret the Christian responses. If we look more closely at some of the Hathor capitals of the temple, we note that the eyes that have been targeted in particular.217 Those parts of the images that the attackers seem not to have been interested in are also of importance. Two observations stand out. The first is the apparent lack of interest in destroying hieroglyphs, frequently depicting animals and

humans, and likened by Shenoute to “prescriptions for murdering a man’s soul…written in blood.”218

If we accept Sauer’s suggestion that pragmatic reasons explain the targeting of particular images, then this may be due to the daunting task it indeed would have been to destroy every single hieroglyph, but we may also consider whether it could reveal something

of how the Christian viewers conceptualized the world of images around them. The

second notable feature is the lack of interest in the crowns that many of the divinities wear.219 Pyramid Texts prescribe that these divine crowns were to be swallowed by the

king in the afterlife to reclaim his divine strength.220 The specific meaning of these images as carriers of divine power thus must have been all but lost in Late Antiquity. In not targeting the crowns that had previously carried very specific ritual meanings, the attackers showed a disinterest in the specificities of cult practices, just as representations of pagan gods had to be identified at the ‘trial’ at Menouthis.

213 Chamber E’, base, north wall, cf. Cauville 2000: pls. 55-56.

214 Chamber E’, first register, east wall, cf. Cauville 2000: pl. 57.

215 Sauer 2003: 95-96.

216 Frankfurter 2008a: 661-662.

217 Hall of Appearances (Chamber Z), column IV, cf. Daumas 1987: pl. 862.

218 See above, “Iconoclasm and Triumphal Narratives in the Nile Valley.” There are, however, examples of hieroglyphs that have been systematically mutilated at Dendara (Chamber T, west wall, first register, relief I, cf. Chassinat & Dunand 1972: pl. 624).

219 Also noted by Sauer 2003: 97. An example where the bodies of figures have been entirely eradicated but the crowns left unharmed is Chamber E', third register, south wall, reliefs I & II (Cauville 2000: pls. 74-75).

220 Hornung 1982: 132.

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The evidence for selective destruction makes it clear that the destruction of pagan images at Dendara cannot be explained solely by reference to "religious hatred" or blind

"fundamentalism." The responses as seen through the various mutilated images in the

Temple of Hathor show diversity in the ways that the agents of response conceptualized images. Some had to be thoroughly destroyed through repetitious acts of destruction,

whereas others for pragmatic but certainly also religious reasons could be targeted in specific ways that successfully eradicated their power. As Frankfurter has pointed out in relation to Dendara, there is much to suggest that some images were targeted more

thoroughly precisely because they were ascribed special powers in contemporary visual

practices. He notes how as one tours Dendara and other sites, "one can see clearly

which divine images still remained potent – for local villagers, certainly, but even more for monks and bishops, sensitive to the persuasive assaults of the Devil."221 Images of Bes were, for example, more frequently attacked than those of Hathor in the Roman

birth house, suggesting once again that Christians were aware of the special powers that these particular images were perceived to hold among pagan worshippers who followed

traditional visual practices and continued to visit the site.222 The destruction in this case and that of the large head of Hathor seems to have been carried out as an attempt to

prevent pagans from using the site for ritual activities. This response is therefore best understood as a Christian effort to control access to the sacred rather than adherence to a biblical prohibition against representation.

A closer look at the details and the context of image destruction at Dendara thus

provides a complementary view to Sauer's discussion, which emphasizes the fanatic

devotion and religious extremism of the image-breakers. Sauer comments that "those

[early Christians] who came…to destroy had no sentiments to waste on the efforts of

generations invested in carving the reliefs, on their artistic or historical value or on their sheer beauty."223 While it is true that selective destruction is less commonly observed at Dendara than elsewhere and that very large portions of the relief decoration in the Temple of Hathor appear to have been destroyed in Late Antiquity, the early Christian

communities present at the site were in most cases fully aware of the powers that these images were perceived to hold, and their responses to them must be seen in relation

to visual practices at least as old as the temple itself, even if some of these had been forgotten or purposefully suppressed.

Responses to Pagan Sculpture in the Theban Region

The Theban region is home to some of Egypt's most famous monuments, including the

Karnak temple complex and the richly painted tombs in the Valley of the Kings.224 The

221 Frankfurter 2008a: 662.

222 Frankfurter 1998: 41, 128.

223 Sauer 2003: 89.

224 On the Theban region in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, refer to Bataille 1952 (the classic overview of the *Memnonia*); Vleeming 1995 (on Thebes in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods); Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 183-208 (offering an overview of the region's history and archaeology).

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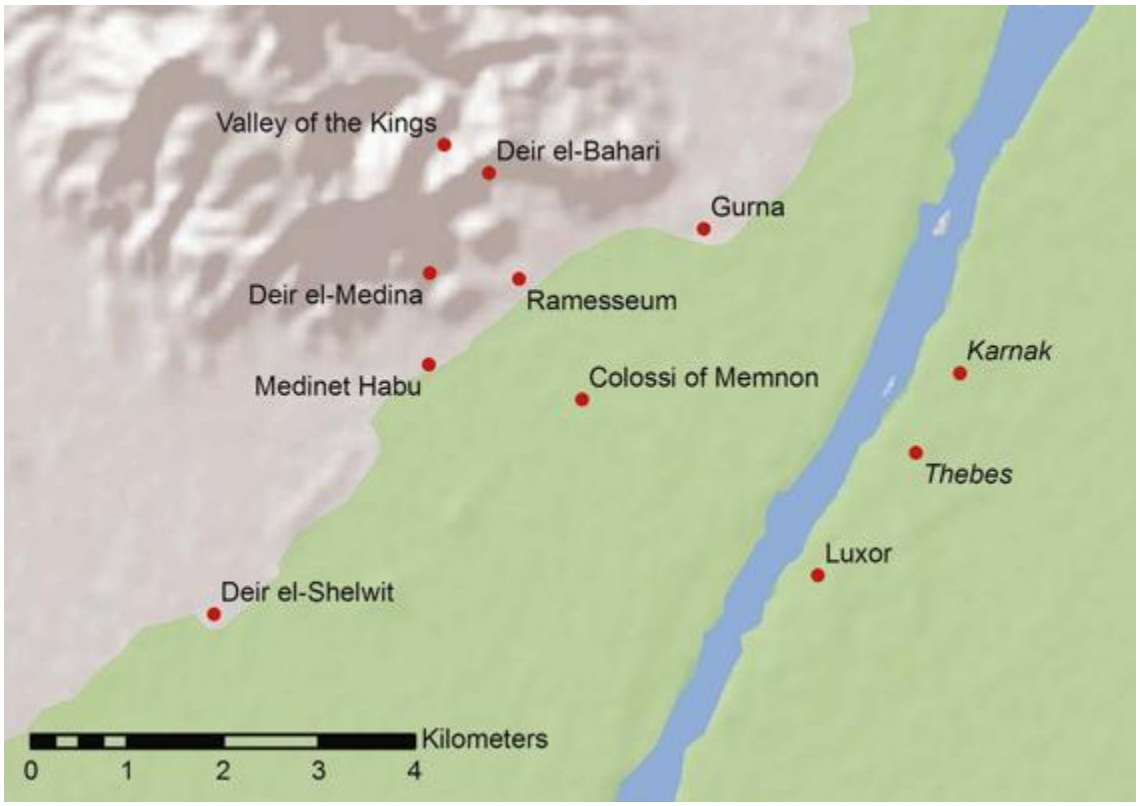

Map of the Theban region with location of sites discussed (map by Eva Mortensen).

Fig. 2.21.

modern city of Luxor covers all but a small number of fragmentary pieces of the ancient city of Thebes itself, whereas the monuments of Western Thebes (known collectively in

the Roman period as *Memnonia*) have been extensively investigated over several hundred years (Fig. 2.21). Several of the Pharaonic, Ptolemaic, and Roman monuments and tombs

in the region were reused in Late Antiquity for both sacred and secular purposes. The

prevalence of the Arabic place-name ‘Deir’ attests to the fact that the landscape was

dotted with monasteries in Late Antiquity. Reconstructions of the late antique history of these monuments rest on a patchwork of textual sources and archaeological fragments that in many cases have been destroyed in the interest of presenting Egypt's Pharaonic heritage to the public.225 Yet the rich evidence that has been uncovered in relation to late antique reuse and appropriation of monuments still makes the Theban region very

suitable for a study of Christian response to pagan images. In the following, I shall

discuss a number of temples and tombs to give a sense of how early Christians treated

the physical remains of the pagan past in this region.

Among the very the first studies that systematically addressed the late antique period in Western Thebes was the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Egyptian Expedition in the

225 Notably, at Deir el-Bahari ("The Northern Monastery"), all post-Pharaonic remains, including an 8 m tall tower structure, were dismantled in the 19th century, see Godlewski 1986: 13-20.

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Buildings e xcavated and published

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Buildings still standing at site, unpublished

Debris of Jeme buildings, cleared by excavators

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Ancient structures reused by Jeme inhabitants

Probable ext

9

ent of Jeme

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1. The Holy Church of Jeme

Buildings e xcavated and published

2. Location of House 34 (see chapter 5)

Buildings still standing at site, unpublished

3. Ancient Well Reused by Jeme Inhabitants

4. Storehouse

Debris of Jeme buildings, cleared by excavators

5. Church

Ancient structures reused by Jeme inhabitants

6. Well

Probable extent of Jeme

7. Church in Ptolemaic Temple

8. Location of Elizabeth Mural (see chapter 4)

9. Small Church (sit

e of Roman period bath house)

10. Storehouse

11. Lime Kiln

1. The Holy Church of Jeme

2. Location of House 34 (see chapter 5)

Fig. 2.22.

3. Ancient W

Map of Medinet Habu (Jeme) in Late Antiquity (map by T.G. W ell Reused by Jeme Inhabit *ilfong, after W*

ants

ilfong 2002, used by

permission).

4. Storehouse

5. Church

6. Well

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1910s.226 Work had been planned to excavate a tomb of the Eleventh Dynasty, but the excavators found the Coptic remains to be so extensive that further study was necessary.227 This led to the discovery of the Monastery of Epiphanius, a site rich in archaeology and historical evidence dating to the sixth and seventh centuries.228 The Monastery of Epiphanius, consisting of a group of central buildings with a number of satellite cells, is typical of the category of Christian small monasteries that reused older monuments.

It appears to have been abandoned around the middle of the seventh century.229 Other

places in the Theban region, notably the Coptic community at Medinet Habu (known

in Coptic as Jeme), show prosperity into the time of Muslim rule and were probably

not abandoned until sometime around the second decade of the ninth century.230 The

date of abandonment is important, as we may infer that the majority of responses to

images must to be prior to the time that the area became much less populated, even if

later destruction and vandalism cannot be ruled out completely.

At Medinet Habu, we can observe how a whole religious complex was taken over

by a small community consisting of closely built up houses located inside and east of

a mudbrick enclosure (Fig. 2.22).231 Four churches functioned as the town's religious

gathering places.232 The community's main church reused the temple's Second Court, a

large open space built up on all sides.233 The church must have been a major undertak-

ing for the community as its construction in the fifth century involved the transforma-226 On the late antique history and archaeology of the Theban region, refer to Winlock & Crum 1926: 3-24; 104-124 (the classic overview of the topography of Western Thebes in the sixth and seventh centuries); Wilfong 1989 (covering bibliography on the seventh and eighth centuries in Western Thebes); 2005: 1-22 (focusing on Jeme/Medinet Habu); O'Connell 2007 (on late antique monastic dwellings in Western Thebes); Lecuyot & Thirard 2008 (on the Coptic archaeology of the Theban mountains).

227 Winlock & Crum 1926: xxi. In an effort to investigate the dynastic tomb above which it was situated, almost the entire monastery was destroyed after two seasons of work. The tomb in question is TT 103, cf. Porter & Moss 1960: 216-217.

228 The archaeology: Winlock & Crum 1926. The *ostraca*: Crum & Evelyn White 1926.

229 Winlock & Crum 1926: 103.

230 Wilfong 1989: 98-99. A small number of inscriptions at Deir el-Bahari dating to the mid-12th century are evidence for at least some activity at this time, cf. Winlock & Crum 1926: 13; Bagnall

& Rathbone 2004: 195.

231 On Jeme/Medinet Habu, see Hölscher 1931: 50-56 (preliminary report on the Coptic remains); 1934 (general plans of the University of Chicago excavations); 1954 (Roman and Coptic remains); Porter & Moss 1972: 460-526 (bibliography on the Pharaonic temples); Wilfong 1989: 96-103

(bibliography on Jeme during the seventh and eighth centuries); 2005 (a social study of the inhabitants of Jeme); Grossmann 2002a: 454-457 (church architecture); Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 193.

232 Hölscher 1954: 51-57. On the eighth-century wall paintings of St. Menas in the chapel inside the Small Ptolemaic temple near the sanctuary's eastern gateway, refer to Edgerton 1937: pls. 98-101; Wilber 1940; Wilfong 2005: 95-98.

233 On the church in the Second Court, refer to Hölscher 1934: pl. 32; 1954: 51-55; Grossmann 2002a: 455-457; 2008: 314.

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Fig. 2.23. *Medinet Habu, view of the Osiride pillars in the Second Court that was converted to a church in Late Antiquity (photo: author).*

tion of the open court into a five-aisled basilica, presumably with a wooden roof. The construction effectively obliterated the Osiride pillars on both the western and eastern sides of the court (Fig. 2.23).234 Unfortunately, the remains of the church were removed during site management undertaken by the Antiquities Service in 1891.235

The extent of these destructive efforts may, however, be contrasted with those of

many other images in the Second Court that were not treated in this destructive fash-

ion. Some images escaped mutilation completely, whereas others (including deities in

234 See also Wilkinson 2000: 197. Compare with the better fate of the Osiride pillars in the First Court, which were built into Coptic houses; Hölscher 1954: pl. 32.

235 For a photograph of the state of the Coptic Church in the Second Court before its dismantle-ment, see Hölscher 1931: 57, fig. 35.

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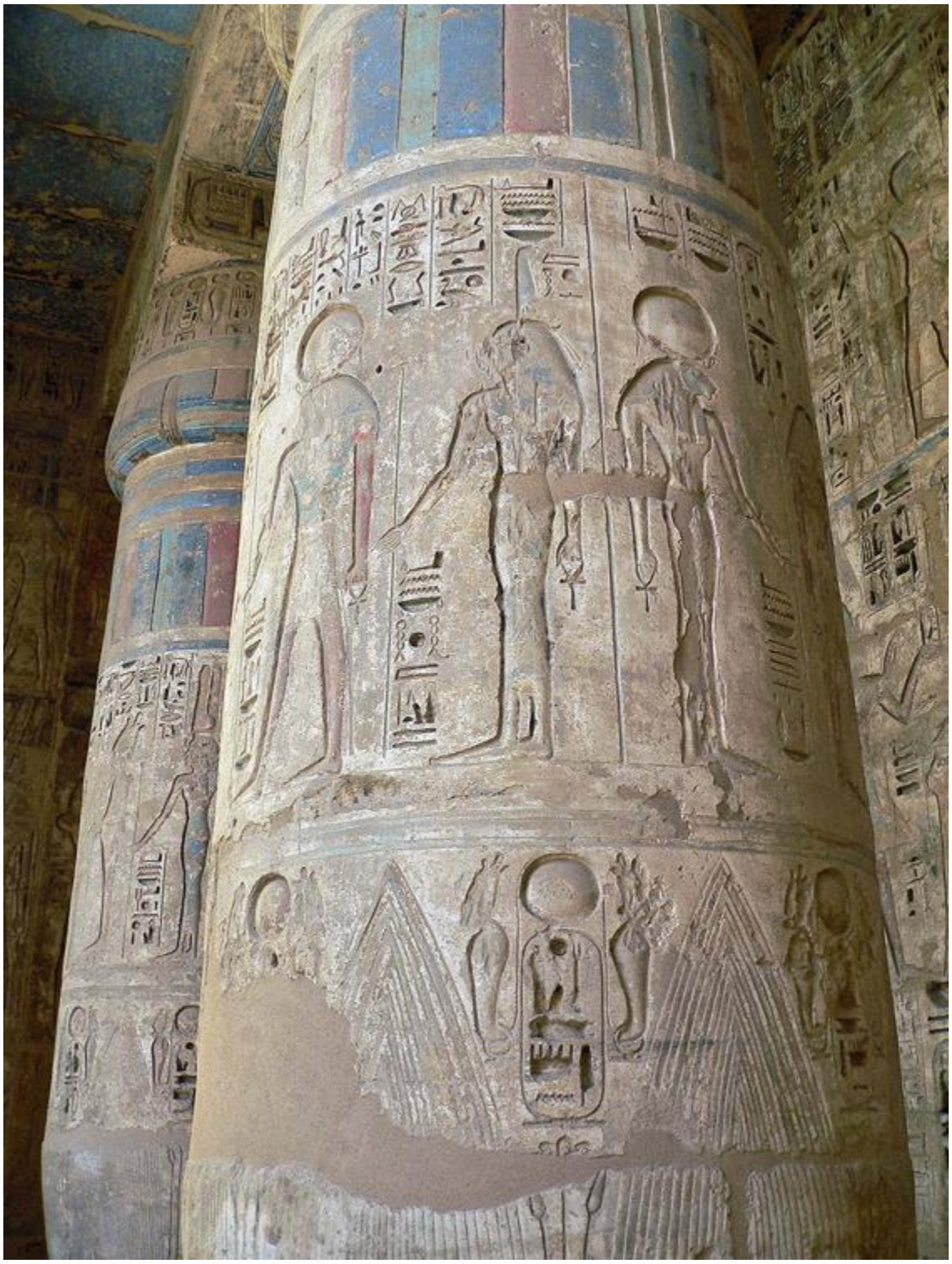

Selective destruction targeting **Fig. 2.24.**

heads at Medinet Habu (photo:

author).

both human and animal guises) were subjected to selective destruction, primarily of the heads (Fig. 2.24). On the exterior façade of the Small Temple, it is interesting to note the treatment of a small secondary engraving (Fig. 2.25).236 Here, next to the carving of a simple cross, we observe destruction focused on the eyes and the necklace of a

secondary *graffito* showing a male head. It appears that this particular attack targeted those parts of the image that were seen as most potent or offensive, even if it may well be regarded as ‘simple’ vandalism.

Within view of Medinet Habu, there was another monastic community today known

as Deir el-Medina.237 Inscriptions reveal that the Ptolemaic Temple of Hathor at the

site was rededicated to the martyr Isidorus (Fig. 2.26). Several crosses of different sizes 236 This is no. 20 on Edgerton’s plan (1937: fig. 7), see also pl. 5. A similar pattern of mutilation can be observed in pl. 27, no. 66.

237 Meaning “Monastery of the Town,” given its proximity to Jeme/Medinet Habu. On Deir el-Medina in Late Antiquity, see Winlock & Crum 1926: 8-10; Heurtel 2004 (Coptic and Greek inscriptions from the Temple of Hathor); Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 199-203. On the Temple of Hathor, refer to Porter & Moss 1972: 401-407 for a bibliographic overview.

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Fig. 2.25. *Selective destruction and crosses, Medinet Habu (photo: author).*

and designs, both carved and painted, adorn the temple.238 French excavations in the

first half of the 20th century also discovered the tombs of many of the monks. Based on this funerary evidence, the monastic community appears to have been contemporary

with that of the Monastery of Epiphanius.239 Many of the names of the monks are

known through inscriptions, giving us a unique view of the individuals that made up

such a community. Concerning their response to the pagan images that decorated the

temple, Pierre du Bourguet has noted the remarkable situation “that the Coptic monks

never made any attempts to deface the Ptolemaic representations of inscriptions of this temple,” hence providing evidence against the frequent allegations of iconoclasm that

late antique monks have been subjected to.240

Yet while it is indeed true that many of the graffiti are placed on the undecorated

facades of the temple and that the three main cult chambers at the back of the temple

seem to have largely escaped destruction of any kind, there are still some scenes that 238 Carved crosses: Heurtel 2004: 120, pl. 2; 122, pl. 4; 129, pl. 11b; 130, pl. 12; 131, pl. 13c. Painted crosses: p. 133, pl. 15.

239 Winlock & Crum 1926: 8.

240 Bourguet 1991: 818.

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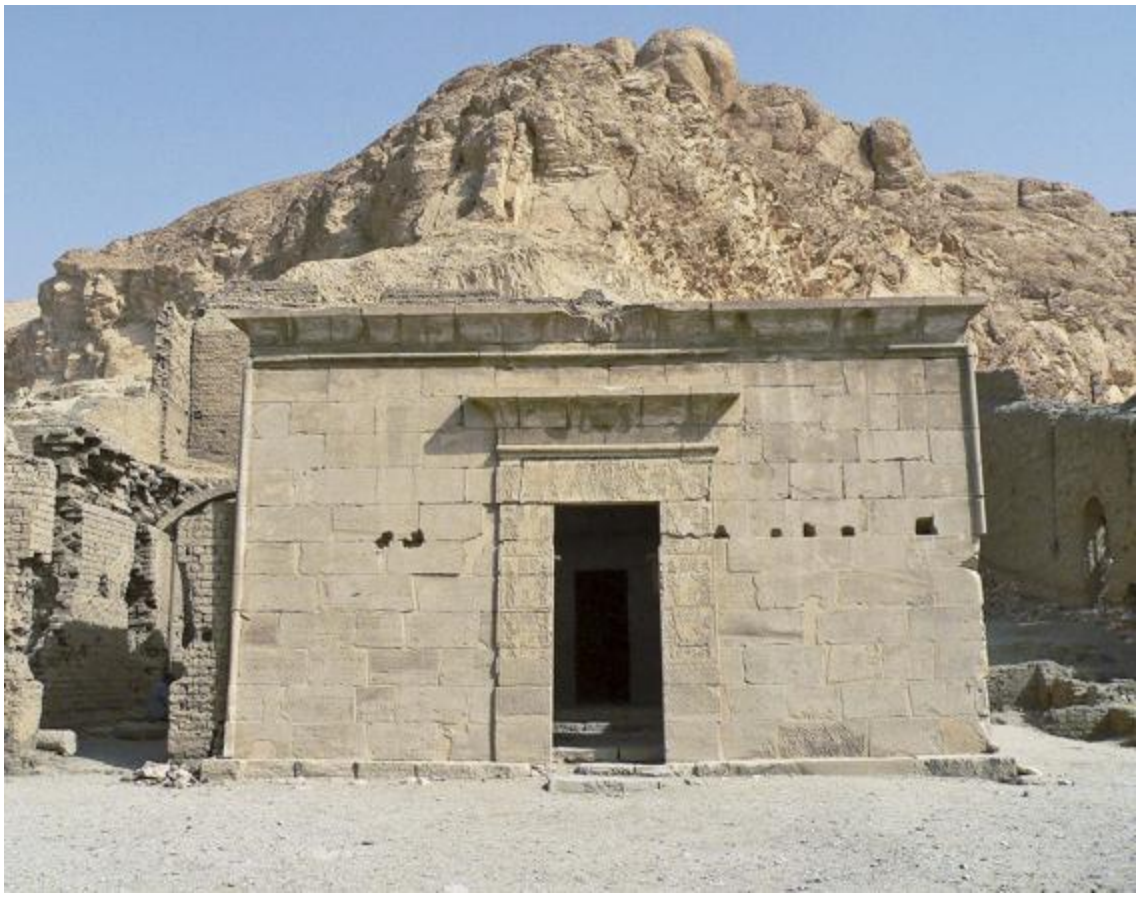

The Ptolemaic Temple of Hathor, Deir el-Medina (photo: author).

Fig. 2.26.

have been mutilated (Fig. 2.27).241 In those scenes that have been targeted, entire figures have been destroyed. This includes, for instance, all figures on both sides of the main entrance to the temple (Fig. 2.26). Dating these mutilations is, of course, an entirely different matter, as the temple has always been a prominent feature in the region. The fact that an engraving of a haloed human figure which may have been an important

figure in the history of the monastery has been thoroughly defaced could suggest that

this destruction post-dates the time when the temple was used by monks.242

Another aspect of the complexity of early Christian responses in the region is ap-

parent in the many royal and private tombs in Western Thebes.243 These tombs were,

of course, less accessible than the temples of the region, yet several of the tombs in the 241 Heurtel 2004: 126-127, pls. VIII–IX, show the distribution of funerary inscriptions naming members of the monastic community on the undecorated south façade of the temple.

242 Heurtel 2004: 4; 121, pl. III; Bourguet 1991: 817.

243 In the following, I shall use the standard nomenclature for the tombs of the region: KV for tombs in the Valley of the Kings, TT for other tombs in the Theban *necropolis*. For an overview of the Valley of the Kings, refer to Porter & Moss 1964: 495-591, and Reeves & Wilkinson 1997.

On the Theban tombs, refer to Porter & Moss 1960 and Kampp 1996. For excellent maps and an updated bibliography on both sites, refer to www.thebanmappingproject.com.

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Fig. 2.27. *Mutilated images in the Temple of Hathor, Deir el-Medina (photo: author).*

Valley of the Kings were extensively visited throughout antiquity and some 2,105 Greek and Latin graffiti attest to this activity.244 Such graffiti have been compared to those of modern tourists, as they leave name, profession, origin, and the occasional personal comment on their visit. Christian graffiti largely follow in this touristic tradition, as many images in the tombs were left unscathed, even in the case of KV 3, which was

converted into a chapel.245 One of the intriguing encounters between past and present

during the Coptic reuse of the tombs in the Valley of the Kings left its mark on the

244 Reeves & Wilkinson 1997: 51.

245 The evidence for the chapel consists of bricks and remains of sandstone columns dating to the Coptic era, cf. Theban Mapping Project: www.thebanmappingproject.com/sites/browse_tomb_817.

html (last accessed 17 August 2012). See also Winlock & Crum 1926: 18-19; Reeves & Wilkinson 1997: 50; 161. According to data retrieved from the Theban Mapping Project, a total of eight tombs in the Valley of the Kings have late antique phases of reuse: KV1 ("Coptic monks' dwelling"), KV2 (crosses, graffiti and images of saints), KV3 (chapel), KV4 ("Coptic residence"), KV6

(graffiti), KV8 (graffiti), KV9 (graffiti), KV24 (late Roman and Coptic artefacts relating to new burials?). The differences in terminology used to describe Christian reuse is characteristic of our lack of knowledge about this period in the Valley of the Kings. On the late antique reuse of KV

tombs, see also Reeves & Wilkinson 1997: 50. For an overview of the Christian reuse of tombs across Egypt, refer to Badawy 1953.

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walls of KV 2, the tomb of Ramses IV.246 There, a monk named Jacob wrote a graffito commenting on life in the reused tomb and recorded his ignorance of the meaning

of the hieroglyphs on the tomb's walls. He also noted how he had covered up parts

of the hieroglyphs with a veil. As part of the *vita* of Apa Pisentius, we also possess a contemporary description of monks visiting a royal tomb, possibly in the Valley of the Kings.247 The account unfortunately only refers to the large number of mummies that

Pisentius and his disciple Joh n found, and not the images on the walls of the tomb that they must have seen.248 However, from the archaeological evidence, it is clear that there is an apparent difference in the Christian treatment of pagan images in the royal tombs and their responses to those in the temples of the region.249 Whilst many images in the temples were destroyed or mutilated, those in the royal tombs mostly went untouched,

in spite of the relatively intensive reuse of these structures during the period in question.

It is unfortunate that both the chronology and precise function of the Christian reuse of royal tombs is so poorly understood.

Looking more widely at the Theban necropolis that had been continuously in use

throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, a large number of crosses and Christian

graffiti attest to the late antique reuse of many tombs there.250 A few examples here

will be enough to give a general picture of the character of this reuse and the treat-

ment of pagan images. Some tombs show several phases of reuse and destruction of

the relief decoration. The Tomb of Amenemhet (TT 82), for example, is illustrative of

the complexity of the afterlives of many Egyptian monuments.251 Built for the scribe

Amenemhet, who lived during the reign of Thutmose III (*c*. 1483-1450 B.C.), it was first targeted by agents of Akhenaten who consistently removed the name of Amun.252

246 Winlock & Crum 1926: 19.

247 For translations, see Budge 1913: 326-330; Lewis & Burnstein 2001: 106-110. Pisentius was bishop of Coptos (599-632) and exiled in the region of Jeme around the time of the Arab conquest, see also Wilfong 2005: 23-24; 36-37. The biography, written by Pisentius' disciple Joh n the Elder, suggests first hand knowledge of royal tombs, giving precise descriptions of appearance and dimensions.

248 Joh n also noted the "sweet smell which emanated from these bodies" (Budge 1913: 327). Subsequently the two monks pile up the coffins, some wrapped in silk, thus creating an eremitic cell for Joh n. Among the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, there is another story of Apa Macarius encountering "some old coffins of the pagans" in a "temple" (*Macarius the Great*, 13, p. 110, ed.

Ward). Frankfurter remarks that this "temple" must be a tomb (2008b: 151, n. 75). However, this is not necessarily the case, as for example at Deir el-Bahari there have been found late antique mummies at the temple site proper, cf. Godlewski 1986: 47-49.

249 As also remarked by Reeves & Wilkinson 1997: 31.

250 For an example of continuous reuse of a Dynastic tomb at Thebes, see Kákosy 1995 on TT 32 ("the Soter tomb"). On the evidence for a Christian "community" in TT 85 and 87, see Behlmer 2007

(with further documentation in Kampp 1996: 336-338; 340-342). In TT 97, a church has been located, see ibid.: 164; on this tomb, see also ibid.: 364-367 for full documentation. Sometimes these Coptic churches only reused the front part of the tombs, blocking off the inner, decorated chambers, see e.g. Bouriant 1889.

251 Davies 1915; Porter & Moss 1960: 163-167.

252 Wilson 2005: 120-122.

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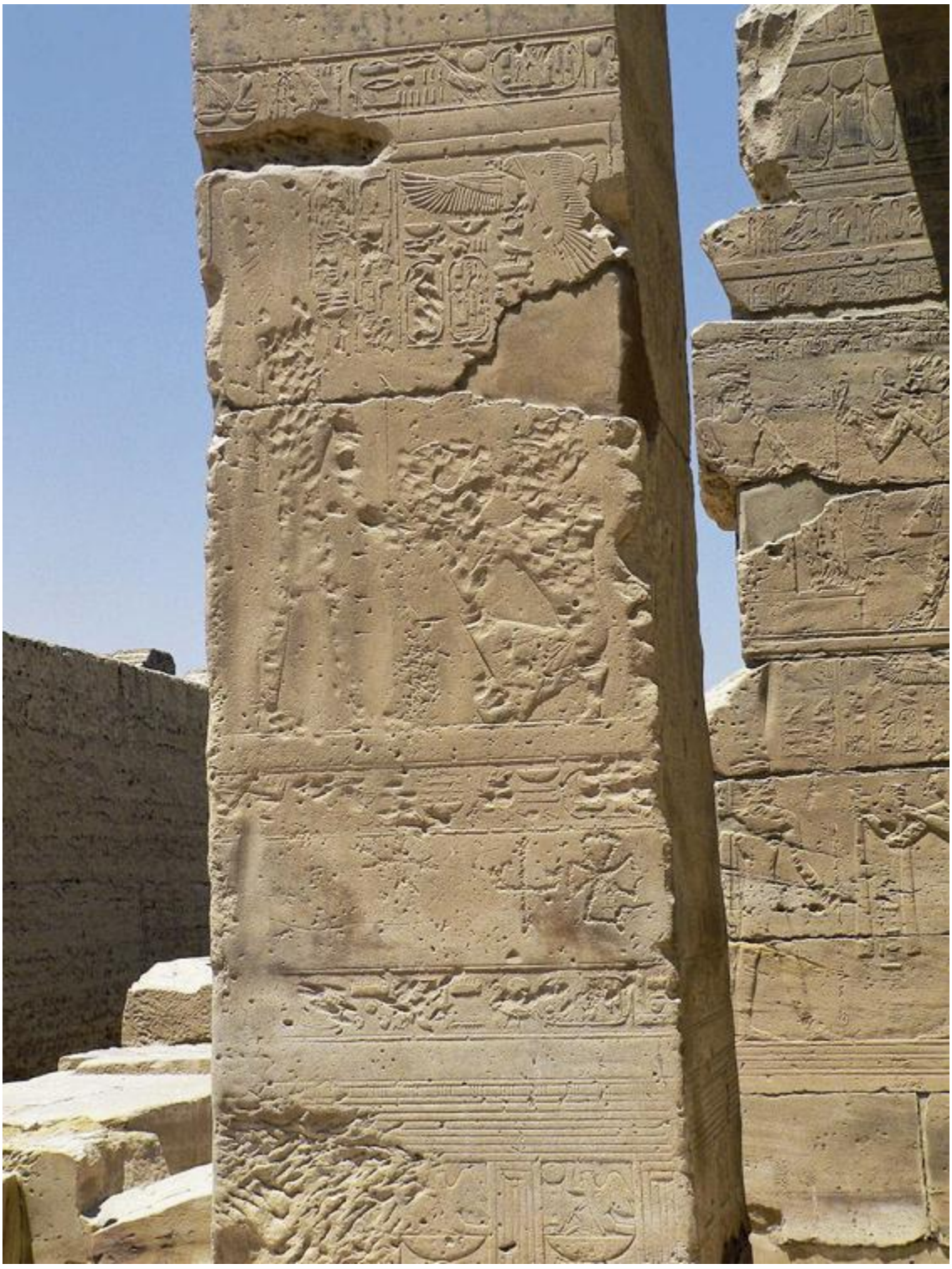

Fig. 2.28. *Mutilated images and crosses,*

Temple of Sethos I, Gurna

(photo: author).

In Late Antiquity, monks who mutilated the faces of several figures, especially those

of women, reused the tomb.253 In a number of other tombs in the Theban necropolis

(TT 56 and 367), it is primarily female figures that have been targeted, although the

tech nique of removal is vastly different from that used on temple walls.254 Smearing

253 Davies 1915: 24, commenting: "Coptic fanaticism is also responsible for much wilful damage. In the Hall and Passage nearly all female heads have been scored across with scratchings inflicted with some sharp-pointed instrument; male heads being spared, there can be little doubt but that we have here the work of Coptic monks who took up their abode in the tomb in later days, and who feared lest their minds be beguiled into evil thoughts by the sight of so much feminine beauty."

This comment is mirrored by Winlock & Crum: "Even today one meets with traces, evidently of early anchorites – an ancient tomb from whose wall-paintings every female figure has been prudishly smeared out" (1926: 15). For a good example of the targeting of a female figure in a scene with male figures, see Fakhry 1943: pl. 20 (a scene from TT 367). Her legs are additionally covered by a large cross. For a further example, refer to ibid.: pl. 21.

254 For TT 56 (Userhat), see Mond 1905: 3-5 (mentioning the use of mud to cover up scenes, which the author removed "by careful washing"); Beinlich-Seeber 1987: 18; 49 (discussing tech nique of erasure; a flat stone was here used rather than the pointy picks used on temple walls). On

ibid.: Taf. 4, the face of the pharaoh (easily mistaken for a divinity) has been mutilated, whereas the **168**

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the faces of figures with mud appears to have been a preferred response. This selective destruction was almost certainly carried out by monks as a measure of defence against

temptation or demonic spirits. The specific rites that could have been undertaken as

part of acts of exorcism are not known, but they clearly depended on the selective rather than systematic destruction of images. Crosses were also inscribed in several instances on the walls of tombs.255

Many other sites in Western Thebes could be drawn into this discussion of Christian

responses to pagan images. The Ramesseum, the mortuary temple of Ramses II, may

have been converted to a nunnery.256 A similar interpretation has been suggested for Deir el-Shelwit (“the distant monastery”) in the southern part of the region.257 But in both of these cases there is a very little archaeological evidence to support a historical narrative, and there is little or no published material from the late antique phases. Nonetheless, when visiting these sites we can identify some of the same kinds of destruction that we have observed elsewhere in Western Thebes. In the Temple of Sethos I at Gurna, many

cases of deliberate destruction can be seen in conjunction with carvings of Christian

crosses (Fig. 2.28). The faces of the Colossi of Memnon are similarly very battered and appear to have been mutilated at some point in time, but it is difficult to date this damage, especially in a case such as this where a monument has been prominently visible

in the landscape through several millennia.

Across the Nile in Thebes, we are on firmer archaeological ground, even if the late

antique phases of the standing monuments have hitherto received relatively little interest.

I have already discussed the transformation of the Luxor Temple. At Karnak, Christian

graffiti are scattered across the site, and four early Christian churches have been located within the great sanctuary of Amun-Re, reusing parts of its physical fabric (Fig. 2.29).258

In the Akh-Menu or festival hall of Thutmose III, Christian paintings of saints and

many scenes of ordinary Egyptians have been left unscathed. For TT 367 (Paser), see Fakhry 1943: 393 (dating the eremetic reuse of the tomb to the 12th century). All crosses and Coptic inscriptions (all in red) in this tomb "were made by one hand" (ibid.: 409).

255 E.g. in TT 56 (Userhat), cf. Beinlich-Seeber 1987: Taf. 3; 13; and TT 356 (Paser), cf. Fakhry 1943: pl. 17; 19-20.

256 On the Ramesseum, see Porter & Moss 1972: 431-443; Wilkinson 2000: 182-186; Wilfong 2005: 106-107.

257 On Deir el-Shelwit, see Zivie-Coche 1982; Wilfong 1989: 126-127; 2005: 106; Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 197-199.

258 Graffiti: Munier & Pillet 1929: 83-87. The literature on Karnak is extensive, refer to Porter & Moss 1972: 1-278 for a bibliography. Legrain

1929 gives a fascinating account of the early excavations and the state of the site in the 19th century; p. 2, fig. I shows the extent of sand outside the First Pylon around 1860. Blyth 2006 is a useful recent monographic overview of the temple site's development over time. For a digital overview of the chronological development of Karnak, see now also the website of the Digital Karnak Project: dlib.etc.ucla.edu/projects/Karnak. For brief overviews of Christian Thebes, refer to Pillet 1928: 143-148; Traunecker & Golvin 1984: 29-32; Blyth 2006: 234-235. The seminal works on the Christianization of Karnak are Munier & Pillet 1929; Coquin 1972.

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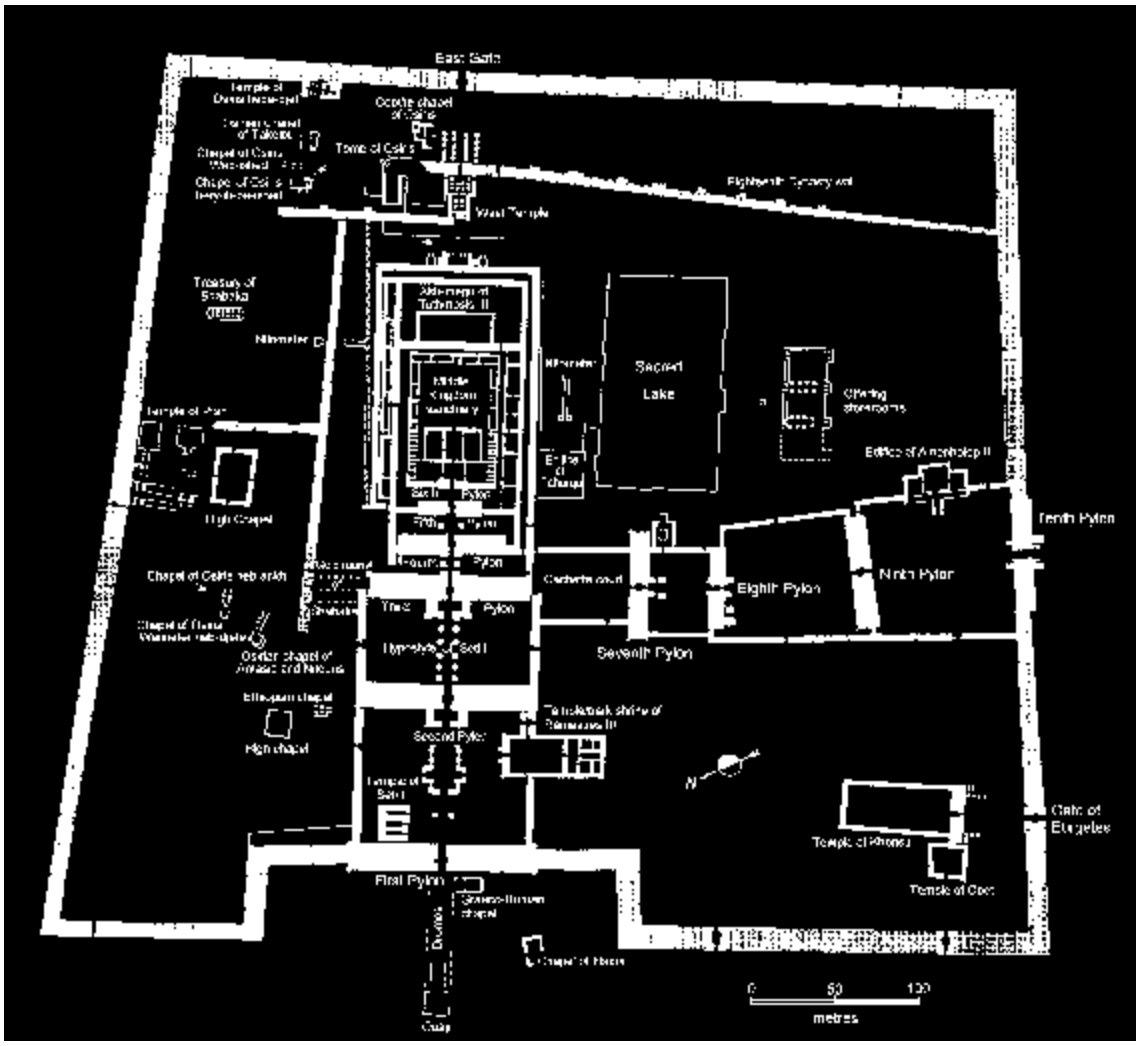

Fig. 2.29. *Map of Karnak at the time of Dynasty XXX (after Blyth 2006: 2, Fig. 1).*

other holy men, perhaps dating to the seventh century, are today only barely visible;

originally this kind of painted decoration represented one way of (at least partially) covering up the visual remains of the pagan past in a simple and effective manner that unintentionally preserves the reliefs intact.259 The destruction that has taken place in this chapel is mostly selective in character, targeting hieroglyphic depictions of living creatures, and specifically the heads and feet of these (Fig. 2.30). This kind of response

259 On the Christian use of the Akh-Menu or Festival Hall of Thutmose

III, refer to Munier & Pillet 1929: 64-74; Coquin 1972: 169-177; Traunecker & Golvin 1984: 31; Le Fur 1994: 114; 123; 182-184.

Modificiations to four columns in the hall were also made to accommodate an altar, cf. Le Fur 1994: 114-115. An inscription on column 5cl gives a date of 16 August 1067, and it appears that the church was abandoned not later than the 13th century (see Le Fur 1994: 114).

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Mutilated hieroglyphs in the Festival Hall of Thutmose III, Karnak (photo: author).

Fig. 2.30.

is a striking contrast to the very thorough destruction of images elsewhere in the temple that have been usurped or subjected to *damnatio memoriae* – for example, the images of Hatshepsut that were destroyed by Thutmose III. These pre-Christian episodes of

destruction are easy to recognize, as they also included the complete erasure of the name of the pharaoh (in hieroglyphs) that was being targeted, and are in general extremely

thorough.

A number of other centres of Christian activity have been located at Karnak. Several

monasteries were established within the sacred precinct of Amun-Re, although their

layout and chronology is very poorly understood.260 In one of these fifteen niches have been carved into the Eighth Pylon, which may have stored a monastic library. These were cut right through the relief images, but more than anything this treatment represents a profoundly pragmatic use of the pagan buildings. Further churches were located inside

the Edifice of Amenhotep II near the Ninth Pylon, and in the Temples of Opet and

Khonsu in the southwestern corner of the precinct of Amun.261 Praying niches across

the site are further testimony to the level of Christian reuse.262

260 On the Karnak monasteries, see Munier & Pillet 1929: 75-82.

261 Edifice of Amenhotep II: Munier & Pillet 1929: 64; Coquin 1972: 177. Temple of Khonsu: Munier

& Pillet 1929: 62-64; Coquin 1972: 177; Epigraphic Survey 1979; 1981; Laroche-Traunecker 1998.

Temple of Opet: Wit 1958; Coquin 1972: 178; Sauer 2003: 100.

262 Traunecker & Golvin 1993: 31.

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Fig. 2.31. *Mutilated hieroglyphs in the Temple of Khonsu, Karnak (photo: author).*

The destruction of images in the Temple of Opet is concentrated on the heads and

feet, especially of the large-size figures on the southern wall; other body parts have been left untouched.263 A large majority of the smaller figures have been left completely

unscathed, suggesting a very careful response in terms of what the attackers chose to

destroy, which perhaps indicates something about the hierarchical standing of individual images in relation to Traunecker's categories of divine images.264

Several crosses testify to the Christian appropriation of the Temple of Khonsu, and its relief decoration appears to have been targeted in a number of ways. This is evident, for example, in cases where hieroglyphic representations have been systematically defaced –

specifically heads and feet – even on those that are located immediately beneath the ceiling of the temple (Fig. 2.31). As was seen at Dendara, the systematic mutilation of these hieroglyphs must have been carried out with the help of a ladder to reach those that were located above the columns of the court (Fig. 2.32). The effort to Christianize this sacred 263 As noted by Sauer 2003: 100, and see Wit 1958: pls. 28-31 for the destroyed faces of figures on the temple's southern wall.

264 For scenes in the temple that have not been mutilated, refer to the many smaller figures on the temple's northern wall in Wit 1958: pls. 23-26.

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Mutilated hieroglyphs in the Temple of Khonsu, Karnak (photo: author).

Fig. 2.32.

space in this way truly lived up to Shenoute's prescriptions against hieroglyphs.265 The images on the temple's walls were, however, for the most part only subjected to selective destruction, focused primarily on the upper parts of the torso, heads, and feet.266

It is interesting to note this focus on the upper parts of the torso, perhaps suggesting that special powers were attributed to that part of the body. The treatment of some of the images on the Gate of Ptolemy III Euergetes, just south of the Temple of Khonsu,

differs from this practice as it follows the standard pattern of targeting feet, hands, and faces, suggesting that these images were mutilated at a different time (Fig. 2.33).

In the Theban region, there is a very large number of sites where Christians appropri-

ated pagan sacred space, whether for residential, ecclesiastical, or monastic purposes.

In this section, I have discussed some of them, and the variety of responses to pagan

images that for which they provide evidence. The Christian phases of reuse are often

pragmatic in character; it is clear, however, that in a number of cases there was a very real need to exorcise these sacred spaces and to protect the new inhabitants from the

perceived dangers of idols and demons. Such exorcism appears to have involved the

265 See above, “Iconoclasm and Triumphal Narratives in the Nile Valley.” The mutilation of the temple’s reliefs has been masterfully documented in Epigraphic Survey 1979; 1981.

266 E.g. Court, West Wall, Top Register, Ninth Scene from South, cf. Epigraphic Survey 1979: pl.

43.

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Fig. 2.33. *Reliefs on the Gate of Ptolemy III Euergetes, Karnak (photo: author).*

selective destruction of images, sometimes extensively (as in the Temple of Khonsu at

Karnak) and sometimes in a more *ad hoc* manner (for example at Medinet Habu). The different treatments of images within one particular site, such as Karnak, show exactly how local the Christian responses could be. This is confirmed when comparing the

much more thoroughly mutilated images in the Temple of Khonsu with those from its

neighbour, the Temple of Opet.

The Theban region does not appear to have had its local Shenoute, and we may

envisage a very heterogeneous group that were responsible for the occasional mutila-

tion of images. We have observed the town-dwellers of Medinet Habu, perhaps mostly

indifferent to the town’s pagan past, except in cases when it directly clashed with the ecclesiastical needs of their community, the monks that moved into the tombs of Western Thebes, and a number of monastic communities who lived among the ruined temples.

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All of their different responses add considerably to the repertoire of agents that we meet through the written sources, and underline the fact that there is a need to deconstruct Shenoute and other monks as the stereotypical agents of Christian iconoclasm in Late

Antiquity.

The regional survey undertaken here has allowed comparison between textual

and archaeological evidence for Christian responses and has shown that there is a

profound difference between the triumphant purges of accounts such as Shenoute's

and the reality of the fate of particular images in temples. This is not surprising as Shenoute was primarily interested in destroying the images that were used in pagan

worship, even in private homes. Shenoute stresses in his controversies with Gesios

that his private collection was used for such purposes, yet demonstrates at the same

time a familiarity with the kind of images that would have been commonly visible in

Egyptian sanctuaries. It was thus important for Shenoute to have the law on his side,

and his rhetoric is similar to that seen in the case of Menouthis. The degree to which such legal sanction was also required in the mutilation and destruction of images in

the temples of the Nile Valley is less clear, and in the case of Dendara, it appears that destruction may have been linked more closely to local tensions between different

religious groups using the same sacred space. At Karnak, the different responses seem

to have been entirely dependent on the nature of the later reuse. In the following, I

shall look closer at a variety of meanings that the Christian responses to cult images could have had and what these tell us about Egyptian conceptions of images in the

Roman and late antique periods.

Embodied Images: Representation and Response in Egypt

In the above discussion of Christian responses to pagan sculpture in the Nile Valley,

I identified a number of cases of the kind of selective destruction that was outlined

in Chapter 1 as an interpretive framework for understanding the cultural logic behind

acts of destroying or mutilating images. The extent to which selective destruction of

particular parts of images was carried out in Egypt is overall very striking and offers an opportunity to discuss the significance of this phenomenon within a well-known

regional tradition of visual practices. This section argues, based on readings of the textual and archaeological sources, that the Christian responses to pagan images in late antique Egypt were closely tied to a particular conception of divine images as possessing qualities of the human body, including the senses. These qualities could be negated through destructive practices that targeted specific body parts, or in more extreme cases, total annihilation by means of burning – a particularly dreaded method of punishment in

Egyptian society, since the total dissolution of the body deprived deceased individuals of the ability to live on in the afterlife.

The basic premise of this section is that the Christian destruction of pagan images

in Egypt reflected a reversal of existing visual practices that juxtaposed flesh and blood bodies with images in stone. Robert Ritner has previously made a similar observation in his study of Egyptian magic, in which he commented that Coptic and Islamic iconoclasm

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closely followed traditional practices.267 The responses of Christian image-breakers in Egypt are subsequently interpreted here with reference to both contemporary methods

of punishment (of human bodies) and older traditions of visual practices. As such, the Christian responses carried religious and social meanings, some of which were unique

to the Egyptian context while others were shared more broadly with the rest of the

Mediterranean world. Together they constitute a culturally specific discourse of image negation that is informative of the role of visual culture in late antique society, at a time when the influence of Christianity became more and more pronounced.

Images and Bodies in Egyptian Culture

A key notion in Egyptian religion was the concept that cult images were in some ways the physical embodiments of divinities.268 This equation between stone bodies and organic

bodies makes it possible to interpret response through Egyptian conceptions of the body.

For instance, the integrity of the body was believed to be extremely important, in this life and the next.269 The maintenance of bodily integrity for the afterlife was achieved through the practice of embalming, which has been described by Jan Assmann as a

ritual performance of the myth of Osiris. This primeval god's body was cut into pieces and thrown into the Nile by his rival Seth, later to be recovered with great difficulty by Isis.270 Mummification mirrored Isis's quest to reunite the body of Osiris and signified the establishment of bodily integrity in preparation for the afterlife. This practice also suggests a possible positive aspect of the act of mutilation: the body could be taken

apart, and yet be assembled again as part of the ritual conventions in relation to funerary practices. Mummification continued to be a common burial practice throughout the

Roman period and into Late Antiquity, which has been demonstrated by archaeological

finds.271 Late antique mummies have, for example, been found in the mortuary temple

at Deir el-Bahari, testimony to the vitality of Egyptian funerary traditions and conceptions of the afterlife into the fourth and fifth centuries.272

Bodily pain and torture furthermore played an important role in Egyptian con-

ceptions of the afterlife.273 The disintegration of the body was believed to equal "the dissolution of the *ba*, *ka*, and other constituents of the self and hence all possibilities for eternity."274 Notions of personhood were in this way deeply interlinked with representational practices in Egyptian culture, an observation which will be important to the interpretation of Christian response that I offer below. As also discussed in Chapter 1, 267 Ritner 1993: 149.

268 Robins 2005: 1, and see above, “Approaching Egypt.”

269 Assmann 2005: 23-38.

270 A quest that is described in great detail by the religious texts, see Assmann 2005: 25.

271 Dunand & Zivie-Coche 2004: 333-338; Dunand & Lichtenberg 2006: 72-93, 123-130.

272 Godlewski 1986: 47-49.

273 Meskell & Joyce 2003: 147-151. On similar connections between images and bodies in 16th- and 17th-century England, see Graves 2008.

274 Meskell & Joyce 2003: 145. See also pp. 148-151 on beliefs regarding mutilation of the body in the afterlife.

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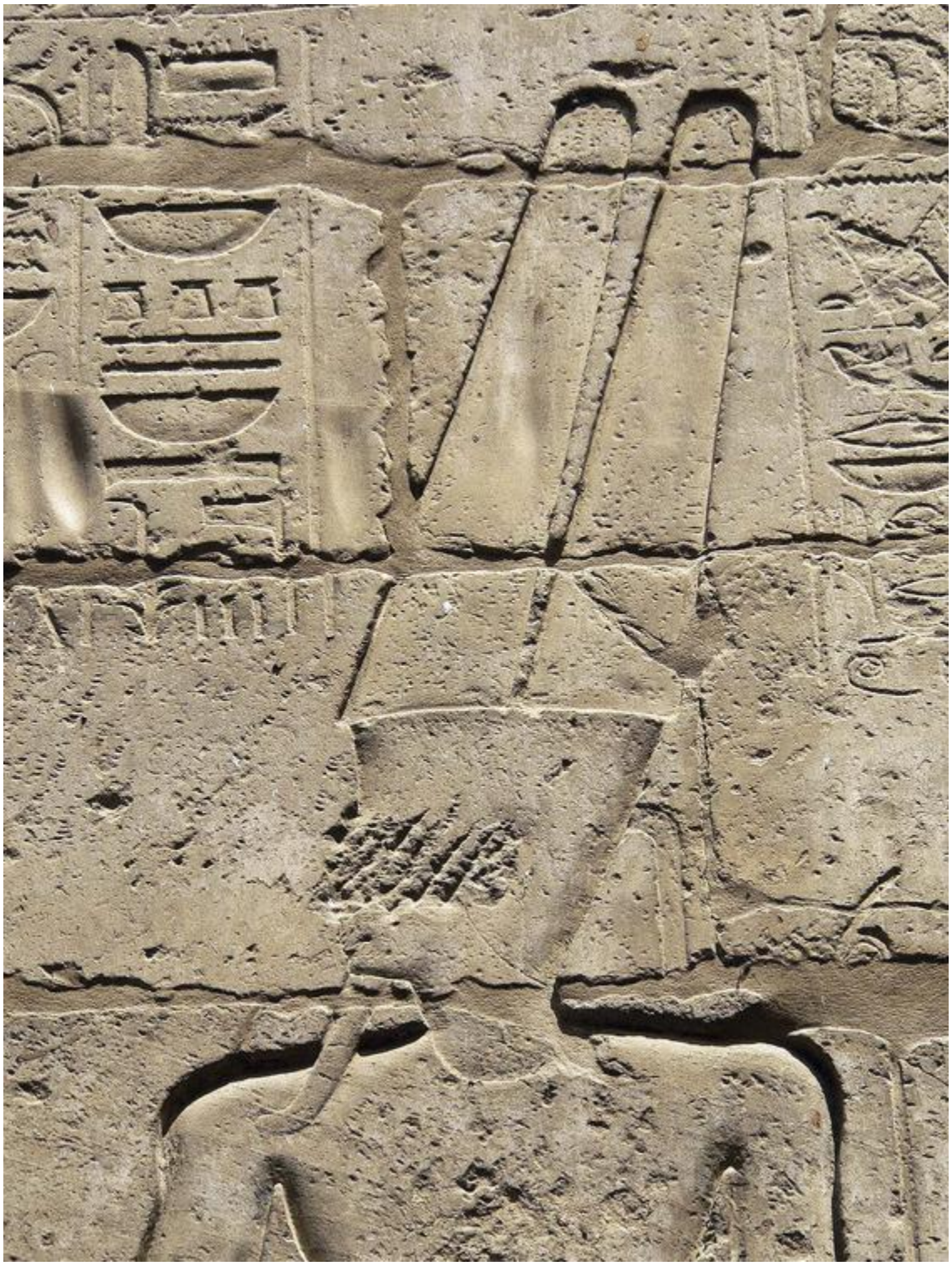

Selective destruction targeting **Fig. 2.34.**

the eyes in the Luxor temple

(photo: author).

the destruction of specific body parts could have particular meanings in the Egyptian

longue durée. Wilson has, for example, discussed the defacement of a Middle Kingdom *stela* in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, where specific parts of the faces, especially noses and mouths, were singled out for mutilation.275 She interpreted this treatment as a "deliberate choice… for in the afterlife it was believed that the mouth and nose were needed and ritually 'opened' to allow the deceased to partake of food and air in order to maintain his ka."276 Likewise, she suggested that the mutilation of the arms and legs of figures served to rule out the possibility of movement in the afterlife.

In the late antique context, there is in the textual sources at least one example of

decapitation as a mode of Christian response in the case of the Horus falcon at Philae, which was regarded as an idol and beheaded by the later bishop Macedonius.277 In

relation to archaeological evidence for similar practices, in Chapter 1 I discussed the treatment of a portrait head of Germanicus from Egypt that had been subjected to a

275 Wilson 2005: 118; and see Bourriau 1982: 51-55.

276 Wilson 2005: 118.

277 Paph nutius, *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt*, 31, see discussion in Dijkstra 2008: 209-213; 265-266.

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Fig. 2.35. *Selective destruction in temple*

at Qasr Qaroun (photo: author).

decapitation attempt as well as intentional and targeted mutilation of eyes, nose, mouth, and ears (Fig. 1.17), as these were apparently considered crucial to the image's ability to uphold life – this is comparable to how the attackers of the Fitzwilliam *stela* targeted specific body parts. Further cases of the selective destruction of specific body parts have already been observed above in the discussions of Christian response to relief imagery at Abydos and in the Theban region. A few additional examples will suffice here. At

Luxor Temple, we can observe how the eyes of some figures have been especially tar-

geted and thoroughly vandalized, whereas the rest of the body has been left more or less untouched (Fig. 2.34). Likewise, the hands, feet, and heads of figures were destroyed in the Late Ptolemaic temple at Qasr Qaroun (ancient Dionysias) (Fig. 2.35), presumably

to deprive the image of the abilities of movement, sight, and breath.278 These examples and those discussed earlier hint at the possibility that some of the millennia-old Egyptian conceptions of bodily punishment and condemnation in the afterlife continued into

Christian times.

278 The mutilated state of the face of this ram-headed Amun is also attested in the Napoleonic *Description de l'Égypte, Antiquités*, IV, pl. 70. On the temple, refer to Porter & Moss 1934: 97; Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 138-139.

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Considering the concept of the integrity of the body and its importance in the afterlife also helps us to interpret some of the best known Christian responses to pagan images

in Egypt. In the case of the destruction of the Serapeum, it was observed that several Christian authors go to some lengths in describing the dismemberment of the main

cult statue of Serapis. Rufinus describes in detail how the statue's *modius* was cut off, its head severed from its body, and its feet and other members chopped off, piece by

piece.279 The individual body parts were then carted off to different parts of Alexandria in an effort to deny the idol its embodied state through the dispersal of the fragments of the cult statue.280 Considering that the Ptolemaic cult of Serapis was rooted in the Egyptian cult of Osiris, it is possible to say that it had come full circle by suffering at least part of the same fate as Osiris in the Egyptian myth. But the Christians at Alexandria actively sought to hinder the reassembling of Serapis' body/image. It is furthermore

ironic that, through this story, the Christian author Rufinus has picked up on what must have been a reaction to the very traditional beliefs of the local population, in spite of his formulaic description of the idol as a "smoke-grimed deity of rotten wood."281 One of Shenoute's acts of destroying images may in turn also be linked to the Osiris myth, when he dumped the idols of Gesios into the Nile having dismembered them piece by

piece.282

The juxtaposition of idols and human bodies is once again encountered in another

famous episode of late antique religious violence in Egypt, namely the murder of the

pagan philosopher Hypatia in 415.283 In the Christian narratives that survive of Hypatia's death, we can observe how her body is equated with that of an idol. For example, Joh n of Nikiû, an admittedly late source writing in the seventh century, explicitly links her death with the end of idolatry.284 Additionally, the treatment of Hypatia's body after her death exactly mirrors the treatment of the cult statue of Serapis some 25 years earlier, at least in some of the ancient sources. Hesychius thus writes that Hypatia "was torn

to pieces by the Alexandrians and her body shamefully treated and parts of it scattered all over the city."285 The Church historian Philostorgius, a contemporary of Hypatia

whose work has survived only in a Byzantine epitome, simply mentions that her body

was torn to pieces, but even this treatment mirrors the destruction of the Serapeum's

cult statue.286 The murder of Hypatia has since come to play a particular role in the

history of mob violence; yet the evidence of Joh n of Nikiû and Hesychius demonstrates that the mutilation of Hypatia's body cannot be seen as mindless violence, but rather

was linked to a culturally defined discourse of equating body and image, in that the

279 Rufinus, *Hist. eccl.* 11.23, and see above, 'The Destruction of the Serapeum and its Statuary'.

280 See also Frankfurter 2008a: 675.

281 Rufinus, *Hist. eccl.* 11.23, trans. Amidon.

282 See above, "Iconoclasm and Triumphal Narratives in the Nile Valley."

283 On the murder of Hypatia, see Dzielska 1995: 83-100; Haas 1997: 313-315.

284 Joh n of Nikiû, *Chronicle*, 84.103.

285 *Suda*, s.v. Hypatia 4, here quoted from Dzielska 1995: 93.

286 Philostorgius, *Hist. eccl*. 8.9.

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dismemberment that was necessary to negate the power of Serapis' stone image was also required for Hypatia's flesh and blood body.

Idols on Trial: Representation and Corporal Punishment

Earlier, I discussed how Shenoute's encounter with Gesios' collection of sculpture concludes with a dramatic case of Christian idol destruction, at least in Besa's version.

However, it is worth noting the ways in which his response lends itself to notions of

punishment and public trial, again equating stone bodies with flesh and blood bodies.

Having uncovered the idols, Shenoute "exposed them openly…so as for everyone to

recognize his (Gesios's) contempt and his shame, for them to recognize that he is a liar for having said, 'There are no idols in my house'."287 This act of public exposure has implications for the interpretation of his and other Christian responses to pagan images.

The trial-like character of Shenoute's performance of iconoclasm is mirrored in the

events that unfolded in 489 at Menouthis.288 As discussed previously, the patriarch Peter Mongus found a large collection of idols here, seemingly still used for worship, hidden behind a double wall in a Temple of Isis. The idols were taken to Alexandria, where

they were at the centre of a mock trial with a pagan priest taking the role as the defence attorney in what could only lead to a certain defeat. The idols were indeed ultimately burnt on a bonfire, but this kind of mock trial highlights the importance of public

participation in acts of iconoclasm. Having idols participate in public trials attributes embodied qualities to them, as bodies to be sentenced for their crimes and ultimately

punished in a spectacle of justice.289 Indeed, idolatry was a capital crime according to several edicts preserved in the Theodosian Code.290

Public spectacle has historically been an important component of the punishment of

criminals.291 The public aspect of Egyptian episodes of iconoclasm, the mock trials and expositions of idolatry, link them to society's sense of punishment and justice. The history of punishment is ultimately tied to constructions of the body, and corporal punishment was commonly applied in both the Egyptian and Roman penal systems. The punishment of criminals of low social status was almost inevitably meted out on the human

body, even if most ancient societies did not have as sophisticated a range of capital and corporal punishments as those which can be observed in medieval Europe.292 Roman

military law especially showed a creative strand for variations of capital punishment, 287 Shenoute, *Let Our Eyes*, frag. 1.25, trans. Emmel.

288 See above, “Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Alexandria’s Hinterland.”

289 See Camille 1989: 224; Graves 2008: 39. Pausanias tells of a bronze statue of Theagenes of Thasos being put to trial for murder, see Paus. 6.11.2-9. For similar cases where statues had to be sentenced by a jury before they could be reused, see Plut. *Tim.* 24 and Dio Chrys. *Or.* 37.21.

290 *CTh* 16.10.4, 16.10.6, 16.10.9, 16.10.23.

291 As seen in Foucault 1977. For this issue in the Roman context, see Hinard 1984: 295-311; Kyle 1998; Kristensen forthcoming b.

292 On corporal punishments in medieval Europe, see Walker 1972: 29-62. On Egypt, see Tyldesley 2000. On Rome, see Bauman 1996: 141-160; Harries 1999: 135-152. On the *post mortem* abuse and disposal of corpses in Rome, see Kyle 1998: 131-133, 220-224.

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including decapitation, bodily mutilation, and the public humiliation of dead bodies.293

There were public opponents of these cruel forms of punishment, notably Seneca and

later Christian authorities such as Augustine, but they continued to be practised in Late Antiquity. At the same time, another regime of corporal punishment evolved with the

rise of monasticism. The disciplining of the body, as stipulated for example in Coptic monastic practices, thus offers one important method of analysing the destruction of

images in late antique Egypt against the background of contemporary bodily practices,

as I shall discuss later.294

One particular case may shed some light here on the juxtaposition of Christian re-

sponses to images and the punishment of bodies in Egyptian society. This case concerns the use of fire as an extreme form of capital punishment, also known as vivicombustion if the victim is alive at the time of initiation of the punishment. Being burnt alive (*vivus exuri*) has remained a particularly cruel and humiliating method of punishment in later history, and was applied throughout Roman history.295 In Egypt, there was a similarly a long tradition of vivicombustion as a particularly dreaded form of punishment. Rebels, who frequently disturbed the social order in dynastic Egypt, were in a number of cases treated to this cruel punishment.296 In the *Books of the Netherworld*, burning by fire was furthermore presented as the most feared form of punishment, explicitly because

it equalled the complete dissolution of the body.297 From an Egyptian viewpoint, “[w]

hat is burnt ceases to exist,” as Jan Zandee has expressed it.298

This understanding of fire as the ultimate method of punishment makes it interest-

ing to note how in many narratives of Christian destruction, for example in the case

of the Alexandrian Serapeum and a series of later episodes such as Menouthis, the

Temple of Kothos, and the legend of Apollo of Hermopolis, that it is fire that destroys the idols. In the case of Menouthis, the rationale of burning is made explicit in the

Life of Severus, in which the author notes that “we wanted to show them that all the power of the pagan gods and demons has actually been dissolved and lost after Christ,

the word of God, had come and become human.”299 Wooden images were, of course,

well suited to destruction by burning, and their slow disintegration would have been a powerful way of demonstrating to viewers that these idols were indeed nothing more

than pieces of wood, as they were described in the usual Christian topoi. The total annihilation of wooden idols would indeed have satisfied even the fiercest of Christian

iconoclasts. Stone images would have provided a less spectacular show when subjected

to fire, and may for that reason alone have been less interesting for monks and bishops 293 Brand 1968: 105-107.

294 On monastic bodies, see Wilfong 1998 and Schroeder 2007.

295 See Bauman 1996: index, “vivicombustion,” for specific cases. Later history: Walker 1972: 56.

296 Leahy 1984.

297 Zandee 1960: 14-16; Hornung 1999: 99; Meskell & Joyce 2003: 145-146.

298 Zandee 1960: 15, for the role of burning in Egyptian conceptions of death, see ibid.: 133-142.

299 Zachariah Scholasticus, *Life of Severus*, 30, trans. Ambjörn.

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when selecting their props in iconoclastic performances. This may explain why stone images were sometimes simply ignored by Christians.

One of the best archaeological cases for the Christian destruction of sculpture in

the round from Egypt, the chryselephantine cult statue found at Kom el-Dikka, ap-

pears to have been subjected to fire (Fig. 2.8).300 The burnt ivory fragments from this statue were found together with two busts of Serapis, both decapitated and blackened

by fire (fig. 2.9). The excavators noted that the chryselephantine statue appears to first have been cut into small pieces and then burnt, as the individual pieces show signs of burning on the sides that had been broken off.301 One may speculate whether the fate

of the fragments that were not found by the excavators was similar to that of the Serapeum cult image and could have ended up in other parts of the city. At any rate, the

means of destruction, in this case leaving puzzlingly few archaeological traces behind, links Egyptian representational practices with specific constructions of the body as an integral whole that is denied an afterlife in a fragmentary state. The status of fire in the hierarchy of punishment could similarly have signified the seriousness of the ‘crime’ of idolatry in the eyes of Egyptian viewers.

Outside of the Egyptian context, we find other examples of pagan sanctuaries and

idols that have suffered fire damage, in both texts and the archaeological record.302

Notably, the Temple of Zeus in Cyrene bears testimony to a large fire that eradicated

the *cella*, and the colossal cult image only survives in small, burnt fragments.303 It is therefore likely to have perished in the fire. Burning has also been identified in the city's Temple of Serapis, located on the acropolis.304 Several mithraea also show evidence of similar episodes of fire destruction, in which cult images would have been destroyed.305

In the case of the Temple of Aphrodite at Argos, stratigraphic evidence points to a fire in the late fourth century which destroyed the sanctuary.306 A series of philosopher bust portraits from Aphrodisias, which may have come from a philosophical school but were

found in a small alleyway behind the Sebasteion, show evidence of fire damage and had

furthermore been decapitated.307 Based on this evidence, we may identify destruction

by fire as a preferred Christian mode of response, in both Egypt and other parts of the Mediterranean.

300 For references, see above, "Further Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Alexandria." The damage to the right part of the British Museum's Germanicus bust may also be the result of fire and/or high temperature.

301 Rodziewicz 1991: 121.

302 On the fire that destroyed the Oracle of Apollo at Daph ne, see Chapter 1, "Why Did Christians Destroy Pagan Sculpture?"

303 Goodchild, Reynolds, & Herington 1958; Sears 2011: 248.

304 Sears 2011: 248.

305 Sauer 1996: 46-47.

306 Bayliss 2004: 125.

307 Smith 1990: 128, 155.

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Scene on the Gate of Ptolemy III Euergetes, Karnak (photo: author).

Fig. 2.36.

Negating Movement: The Perception of Feet in Christian Response

It will now be useful to address two additional kinds of Christian response and their

role in the discourse of image negation in Egypt. The first appears to be closely linked to Egyptian conceptions of visual culture, whereas the second can also be observed in

other parts of the Mediterranean. The discussion draws on a selection from the extensive corpus of thousands of images that adorn the temples of the Nile Valley, many of which were mutilated by Christians in Late Antiquity, as shown in the above discussion. Much of this destruction was selective, targeting only specific body parts; it is important to look at the meaning of this response, part by part, as it were. For example, in a relief scene on the Gate of Ptolemy III Euergetes at Karnak depicting a pharaoh making offerings to Hathor and Khons-Thoth, it is noticeable that the feet (as well as the heads and hands) of the representations have been thoroughly mutilated, whereas the rest of

the bodies went unscathed (Fig. 2.36 and compare Fig. 2.33). The treatment of other

images on this gate follows a similar mode of response. Indeed, at Karnak and in several major sanctuaries in the Theban region, the repeated targeting of feet appears to have been a specialty of Egyptian Christians (Fig. 2.37).308 The archaeological evidence for this treatment also finds textual support. In the previously discussed *Life of Severus*, the 308 See also remarks in Brand 2000: 95.

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Fig. 2.37. *Crosses and selective destruction*

in the Ramesseum (photo:

author).

populace of Alexandria mocks the idols that were collected at Menouthis and breaks

off their feet as well as their hands.309

At a very basic level, feet offer support for the human body; they allow us to stand

up straight and give us the ability to move. Like many other parts of the body, feet

can be imbued with both social and religious potency, yet that potency depends much

on local bodily practices and traditions.310 It will become clear that the mutilation of feet in Egyptian temples testifies to the ongoing importance of local traditions of embodied images, yet the response came to have further significance throughout the rise

of Christianity and Coptic monasticism. The practice is not attested to in other parts of the Mediterranean, nor was it part of the repertoire of *damnatio memoriae* that was primarily aimed at erasing the identity of portrait statues.

Earlier cases of image negation can provide clues as to how Egyptian Christians would

309 Zachariah Scholasticus, *Life of Severus*, ed. Kugener, 35.

310 Feet are at the same time the most direct surface of contact between the body and the ground.

They are thus in some cultures given great significance in religious rituals and social practices.

The kissing of feet is, for example, considered to be a display of great respect and submission in many cultures. For a study of feet in Indian

culture, see Jain-Neubauer 2000.

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Chapter 2

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have perceived the mutilation of the feet of representations. In her discussion of the defacement of the previously mentioned *stela* in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Wilson noted the mutilation of the feet and interpreted this as an attempt to rule out the possibility of movement in the afterlife.311 The treatment of the representations on this *stela* is similar to the late antique treatment of feet on temple walls, which is also seen in combination with other kinds of selective destruction (Figs. 2.33, 2.36-37). The Christian response thus reflects an ancient Egyptian visual practice in suggesting that the act of mutilating the feet of stone bodies was believed to negate the embodied quality of movement.

Beating of the feet was additionally a common form of punishment in many periods

of Egyptian history and continued to be so into Late Antiquity, with the advent of

monasticism.312 Monasticism introduced a new regime of corporal punishment for the

purposes of disciplining the body and is as such useful for understanding contemporary bodily practices. For example, a fifth-century sermon by Shenoute informs us of some

of the corporal punishments that were used within the confines of his monastic com-

munity.313 In several parts of the sermon, Shenoute sees the wrongdoings of a group of nuns through bodily terms. They have stolen *with their*

hands, lied *with their mouths,* etc. The punishment of the perpetrators, all nuns who are mentioned by both name

and a list of their crimes, is similarly tied to the body.314 Shenoute puts forward the following sentence: “the abbot shall by his (own) hands administer to them on the bot-tom of their feet when they are seated on the ground, while the mother superior and

Tahôm, and other older women assisting them, hold them for him, and while the other

elders, who are there with them assisting him, hold (them) with rods over their feet for him until he quits chastising them, as we have also done to some formerly.”315 Discussing Shenoute’s sermon, Terry Wilfong noted how this particular bodily punishment

would have reminded the nuns of their crimes long after it was meted out: “Given the

amount of walking required by the women’s daily monastic duties, this punishment was

intended to provide lasting pain, presumably as a warning to the nuns to control their bodily actions and desires.”316 The purpose of stocks in medieval Europe was similarly to make the movement of minor offenders as difficult as possible, to remind them of

their crime.317 The treatment of the feet on the walls of Egyptian temples thus mirrored practices that were part of the construction of discipline in monastic communities and society at large.

The targeting of feet in cases of Christian destruction had a particular resonance

in Egyptian society, which helps to explain its wide prevalence. Whether one sees the

311 Accession no. E.SS.37, see Bourriau 1982: 51-55; Wilson 2005: 118; Martin 2005: 48-49, cat. no.

29.

312 Wilfong 1998: esp. 126; Tyldesley 2000 .

313 Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, 1301131-142; see Young 1993: 91-113; Wilfong 1998: 125-126.

314 Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, 1301131, l. 345-350; see Young 1993: 112.

315 Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, 1301131, l. 349-350; quoted from Young 1993: 113.

316 Wilfong 1998: 126.

317 Walker 1972: 40-41; 50.

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treatment as similar to corporal punishment in contemporary society or as part of long-established traditions of desecrating selected parts of images to negate their bodily properties, the response to one particular body part of these images is reflective of beliefs in the embodied qualities of representations – that these images could feel pain and be corporally punished like a human body.

Sin, Nudity, and the Power of Phallic Images

I have previously discussed how Besa linked idolatry with sin and temptation. As idolatry was considered by early Christians to be a major

sin, the different methods of

punishment applied to sinners are important in understanding the nature of Christian

response.318 The punishment of sinners in this life and the next was a key theme in

early Christian literature and art, which enables a contextualization of the Christian responses as seen through the archaeology. The links between the discipline of human

bodies and the perceived sins of stone bodies are clear from some of the Christian

responses to phallic images, which in many cases have been mutilated or even entirely

removed from Egyptian temple reliefs. These phallic images notably include represen-

tations of Min, the Egyptian fertility god depicted with an erect *phallus* as his main iconographical index, and the creator god Amun, who was sometimes depicted in a

similar fashion to Min. In a large number of Egyptian temples, such representations of Min and Amun-Min have been ‘castrated’, often by Christians who did not approve

of this particular kind of imagery. Shenoute, whose monastic community was located

in an area that venerated Min/Pan and just across the Nile from his main sanctuary at

Panopolis, refers in a sermon to “the Pan, who is Min, this one whose indecency their

hearts resemble in their hardness.”319

The removal of *phalli* is a response that at first appears to be directly rooted in religious change and new attitudes towards the body and nudity.320 Yet it may also have

further, local significance. In Egyptian culture, castration had a long-standing place as "the ultimate sign of power over the bodies of one's enemies,"321 and Christian responses to phallic images may have appropriated this meaning. The *phalli* of statuary were removed in other parts of the Mediterranean in Late Antiquity, but the Egyptian

evidence goes some way to show that phallic images here were still perceived as power-

ful and were subsequently removed for a variety of reasons, some destructive, others

more accommodating.322

318 In the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers,* for example, idolatry is directly linked to the sin of fornication, see *Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Lot*, 2, trans. Ward, p. 122.

319 Quoted from Emmel 1994: 44.

320 On the Christian body, see in general Brown 1988. Incidentally, the response is mirrored in late 19th- and early 20th-century archaeological publications, e.g. Petrie 1896: pl. 9 where on a relief scene of Usertesen I dancing before Min, an explanatory text has been conveniently placed over Min's phallus.

321 Meskell & Joyce 2003: 100; 149-150.

322 On further examples of 'castration', see Chapter 3, "Liminal Places and Christian Response at Scythopolis."

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Representation of Min in the

Fig. 2.38.

Luxor temple (photo: author).

An example in the Temple of Sethos I at Abydos shows how the mutilation of the

phallus could be combined with the already discussed practices of mutilating hands, feet, and faces, but not necessarily the entire figure (Fig. 2.16). In Late Antiquity, the Temple of Sethos I was, as discussed previously, appropriated as a nunnery, thus exposing the reliefs to a variety of Christian responses. In the Luxor temple, where several churches were constructed in Late Antiquity, another representation of Min suffered a

similar fate when his *phallus*, head, and arm were mutilated (Fig. 2.38).323 At Dendara, considerable effort was required to reach a *phallus* of Min on the fourth register of reliefs on the exterior façade.324 The whole area around the *phallus* was in this case removed. A similar example is located on the east gate of the Temple of Opet at Karnak.325 *Phalli* on representations of Min also were mutilated at more remote locations such as in the rock carvings at Wadi Hammamat.326 In other cases, the *phallus* is the only part of an image 323 And see Brand 1999: 132, fig. 21.

324 Exterior of *naos* H', east wall, fourth register, relief XV, cf. Cauville 2007: pl. 99.

325 Wit 1962: pl. 13d.

326 Examples in Bernand 1972: pl. 14.2; 15.2.

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Fig. 2.39. *Tenth-century wallpainting from a (now destroyed) church at Tebtunis in the Fayum (photo courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society).*

that appears to have been destroyed.327 Such selective targeting of one particular body part does not suggest an opposition to pagan images per se, but to very specific parts of those images that were deemed to be powerful or unacceptable for public display.

Another way of looking at these ‘castrations’ of Min is through contemporary concepts

of the punishment of sinners. We saw in Shenoute’s sermon discussed above how vices

could be linked to specific body parts. There are further cases from Christian literature to show that the punishment of sinners should match the crimes committed. In the

Apocalypse of Paul, for example, a tour of Hell demonstrates to the reader how specific sins were punished by distinct (and very nasty) treatments of the human body.328 In

one case, a public reader has his lips and tongue cut out for not practising what he

preached.329

Such body-specific punishments after death could also include attacks on genitalia

327 See example in Brand 1999: 113-134, esp. 125, fig. 23.

328 *Apocalypse of Paul*, 31-44, tr. Elliott (*Apocryphal New Testament*), 633-639; see also Harries 1999: 146-46.

329 *Apocalypse of Paul*, 36.

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Scene in the Temple of Horus, Edfu (photo: author).

Fig. 2.40.

or breasts (depending on gender and sin committed) by serpents in the afterlife, a treatment that is depicted on a now sadly lost wall painting from a tenth-century church at Tebtunis in the Fayum, which in one scene showed two naked sinners (Fig. 2.39).330 The man in the wall painting is labeled “he who fornicated with a woman” and the woman,

“she who gave her breasts for money.”331 The man’s penis is depicted being eaten by a

snake, and the flames of hell are shown in the background. The treatment of the *phalli* on temple walls in this way mirrored the punishment of sinners in Hell, as represented in the Tebtunis church and Christian scripture.

Yet the responses to the *phallus* of Min in Late and Post Antiquity also attest to a continuous conception of its efficacy. There are thus several cases where the *phallus* appears to have been entirely removed from a wall, whereas other parts of the relief

decoration have suffered little or no damage. Figure 2.40 is one such example from the 330 Walters 1989; Wilfong 1998: 126. For further discussion of the relationship between Coptic conceptions of Hell and the afterlife and earlier Egyptian thinking, see Zandee 1960: 303-341; MacDermot 1971: 144-155.

331 Quoted from Wilfong 1998: 126.

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Temple of Horus at Edfu where the missing *phallus*, and the space it left behind, has since been covered over by modern restoration. The care and selectivity in this response is suggestive of the existence of a hierarchy of the potency of images, in which some

body parts were perceived as more powerful than others. It has been suggested that

the *phalli* were removed to be ground up and used as an aphrodisiac or in other rites of fertility.332 It is clear that this kind of removal must have been a positive response to the power of phallic images, but it is difficult at present to take this interpretation further. However, it does help us see that seemingly destructive responses may have had a broader palette of meanings that can be difficult to reconstruct today. Other evidence also points to more nuanced Christian attitudes towards the body and nudity in late

antique Egyptian society. For example, in the early Christian necropolis at Bagawat in the Kharga Oasis, Adam and Eve were portrayed nude in wall paintings.333 As such,

the mutilation of *phalli* on temple walls should be seen as one end of a spectrum of Christian responses to and appropriations of the pagan past.

Selective Destruction in Late Antique Egypt

In the above, I have argued that cases of selective destruction in Egypt must be understood through culturally specific conceptions of images and bodies. The juxtaposition

of stone bodies and bodies of flesh and blood was a common but often unemphasized

feature in the Christian sources of the period, notably in the treatment of Hypatia's

body as like that of an idol. This notion, referred to here as embodied images, informed the ways in which Christians physically treated the images that surrounded them in

temples and tombs in the late antique period – even though it goes directly against

Biblical doctrine on idolatry, which states that idols are devoid of bodily abilities such as speaking, hearing, and so on. There was no set formula, however, for the mode of

selective destruction. For example, mutilating the feet was not always seen to be enough to negate the ability of movement. Hence at some sites, such as Edfu and Dendara,

both legs of many representations were targeted as well. Such differences suggest that the responses were episodic and part of occasionally very local circumstances, even the agency of individuals reacting to particular needs or fears.

It may be argued that, at least to some extent, the discourse of response is cross-

cultural, informed by universally shared concepts of representations and the efficacy

of images. In my discussion of destruction by fire, for example, I identified images

from North Africa, Asia Minor, and Greece that have been treated in a similar fashion

to some of those in Egypt. However, the view of a universal language of destruction

implies that representational culture is static and does not evolve across time and space.

The Egyptian cases discussed here challenge this view and suggest that more attention

needs to be paid to the local circumstances of Christian response and destruction. The 332 Meskell & Joyce 2003: 107.

333 Notably in the Chapel of Peace, see Zibawi 2005: pl. XXIX, 2. For a nude representation of Venus from late antique Egypt, see also a fragment of a fifth-century ivory relief in the possession of the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, in Brooklyn Museum 1941: 36, cat. no. 101.

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responses of local viewers can be identified through closer readings of contemporary texts as well as the archaeological evidence.

It can be very difficult to connect specific instances of selective destruction with

specific points in time and specific agents, but the extensive evidence for practices such as the selective destruction of body parts points to the prevalence of beliefs in embodied images in Egyptian society. Where Christian phases of destruction can be identified,

these responses are best illuminated through the lens of a long-lived local tradition of visual practices, which I discussed in the beginning of this chapter. The treatment of particular body parts in Egypt thus reveals that there existed a culturally specific discourse of image negation that, while sharing similarities with other traditions of visual practices, was culturally distinct. This discourse was in turn appropriated by Christian Egyptians whose responses were rooted in a complex mix of local traditions of religious imagery

and Christian teaching on idolatry. In studies of Christian responses to pagan images, there is thus a need to look both at the more universal responses (such as decapitation and the mutilation of heads and eyes), as well as those that seem to be more grounded

in a specific time and place (such as the mutilation of feet).

Working with selective destruction in these contexts is, however, not without its share of methodological problems. The chronology of such treatments is rarely understood,

and as has been mentioned, the time depth involved complicates things even further.

Several instances of selective destruction of particular parts of images have been documented from dynastic times, as seen also in the discussion of the Fitzwilliam *stela*.334

That the concept of embodied images continued to be prevalent in Egyptian society in

Islamic times is apparent from the removal of the nose of the Sphinx at Giza in the 13th or 14th century. Other practices must also be taken into account. For example, in the

magical practices relating to healing statues that were discussed earlier, special significance was given to the hands and heads; special powers were attributed to these parts

of the body that indicate an altogether more positive response.335 In the decoration of the Temple of Kh num at Esna (Latopolis), we find not only a case of *damnatio memoriae*, as an image of Geta was mutilated after his murder in 211, but also another visual practice that poses important questions.336 A wide range of representations of people, divinities, and some animals were meticulously mutilated in this temple (Fig. 2.41).

Serge Sauneron, who has published the decoration of this temple, discussed whether

this damage should be seen as destructive or, more positively, as an attempt to harvest the potency of these particular images.337 Wilson has furthermore noted how the belt

of Isis and other signs of fertility were targeted.338 Such magical and healing practices 334 See Meskell & Joyce 2003: 150; Wilson 2005: 114-115.

335 Kákosy 1987.

336 On Esna, refer to Porter & Moss 1939: 110-119; Sauneron 1962; 1968; Bagnall & Rathbone 2004: 219-224.

337 Sauneron 1968: xxiv–xxvi; Wilson 2005: 115-116. A church is located just outside the Temple of Kh num at Esna, see Grossmann 2002a: 459-460.

338 Wilson 2005: 115.

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Fig. 2.41. *Selective destruction in the Temple of Kh num, Esna (after Sauneron 1968: XXIV, used by permission of IFAO, Cairo).*

that may be regarded as destructive can thus in turn have had very different meanings

to viewers in the past.

Finally, there are limits to the interpretative framework of embodied images. In Egyp-

tian religion, the bodies of gods could be endlessly reproduced through representation as well as mutilated in ways similar to human bodies.339 Yet ultimately they could not be destroyed. Seth is the primary example of

this; endlessly tortured by Horus, he kept reappearing in new forms. Clearly late antique Christians in Egypt expected more from

their mutilations of the bodies of pagan gods. The careful dispersal of the fragments of the cult statue of the Alexandrian Serapis and the countless attacks on representations of pagan divinities on temple walls are suggestive of the lengths to which the early

Christian communities of Egypt were willing to go to negotiate the power of images

in the contested religious environment of Late Antiquity.

Christian Response and the Transformation of Sacred Space in Egypt

This chapter has looked at a wide range of early Christian responses to pagan images

within two distinct regions of Egypt, that of the Mediterranean metropolis of Alexandria (including its immediate hinterland) and that of the Nile Valley, where early Christian monasticism flourished. It emerged that the responses that can be observed in Alexandria 339 Meeks & Favard-Meeks 1997: 74-77.

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are more connected with those of the rest of the empire at large than those perceptible elsewhere in Egypt. The emperor was even directly involved in the case of the destruction of the Serapeum in 392, actively engaging in the local religious politics of the city.

It is also in this part of Egypt that we find examples of *sphragis*, the phenomenon of carving crosses on pagan images that we do not see in

other parts of the country but

occurs in a number of other regions of the Mediterranean. The similar example from

Abu Mina is firmly within the cultural *milieu* of Alexandria.

To what degree was the destruction of temples and idols in other parts of Egypt a

trickle down effect from the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria? It has been suggested by Emmel that the events in Alexandria provided the inspiration for Shenoute's

attack of temples in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, which in turn inspired other Christian narratives, such as the *Vita* of Moses of Abydos. It is very likely that a high-profile spectacle such as the destruction of the Serapeum would have had such

an effect. But elsewhere, we have encountered communities that may have been rather

indifferent to the occasionally tense religious atmosphere of Alexandria. By adhering to hierarchies of images as old as the pagan temples themselves, these communities were

able to negotiate the pagan past in a way that suited their present needs. I have devoted a large part of this chapter to these traditional visual practices, arguing that those who destroyed or mutilated pagan images in Egypt were quite unlike the equivalent of an

ancient Taliban. The semantics behind the responses manifest themselves in the numer-

ous examples of selective destruction that have been observed in many of the Egyptian

temples discussed in this chapter.

As pointed out by Sauer, there is furthermore a need to recognize the logistics of

Christian response. The endless reliefs in Egyptian temples may have proved too much

for even the most determined Christian iconoclast, but the ways in which specific im-

ages were chosen for a given response also reveal something about how late antique

communities conceptualized these images and their powers. Targeting the most power-

ful images, the cult statues (Traunecker's action images) and those that were the focus of popular devotion and related to manifest cults, was essential to creating a Christian sacred landscape. Other categories of images were not treated as harshly or systematically. In some ways, this was a very practical matter of protecting Christians against demonic presences or other perceived dangers in an increasingly demonic landscape of

alterity. This can also occasionally be seen in the reuse of tombs in the Theban region and in the tombs and quarries at Deir el-Bersha that were reused for monks's dwellings, where the placement of crosses across the landscape provided protection for safe passage through a place that was traditionally considered to be the domain of spirits

and demons.340 This practice is in turn similar to the carving of apotropaic *phalli* in the houses and cityscapes of the Roman period, showing again a cultural link to the past

in terms of perceiving the physical landscape and its potential dangers. Nowhere else

340 On crosses in the quarries of Deir el-Bersha, refer to Griffith 1895: 64 and Badawy 1953: figs. 3-4.

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is the emergence of such a Christian landscape more visible than in Western Thebes, where the transformation can be followed in a number of different settings.341

To illuminate the identities of those Christians who responded destructively to pagan

images in Egypt, it is necessary to look beyond the textual sources and the evident biases of the hagiographies, focusing as they do on a very particular group of agents. In the case of Alexandria, we may see the destruction of the Serapeum as carried out by a very heterogeneous group, including no doubt both the agents of the bishop Theodosius

and those parts of the city's Christian population looking for a good fight, as it were.

Some responses at the Serapeum were very thorough, including the destruction and

dismemberment of the main cult image, but a lot of the other statuary from the site

was clearly treated in a variety of ways, some more destructive than others. There is

no reason to believe that a single group was responsible for these varied responses. The crowds in the Menouthis trial undoubtedly also consisted of a wide variety of people

with many different backgrounds and different motives. Equating the actions of these

early Christian viewers with those of the Taliban may appear to make the study of "re-

ligious hatred" in Late Antiquity relevant to present society, but it is less enlightening about the range of responses to pagan images that are observable in Egypt.

When looking at the destructive responses to pagan images among some Christian

communities, it is necessary to remember that the same periods also saw a flourishing

of a new Christian visual culture, for example, in the tomb chapels of Bagawat in the

Kharga oasis, in the decoration of hermits' cells at Esna, and in monasteries across the country.342 Even Shenoute did not disapprove of Christian imagery. Curatorial attitudes towards pagan statuary can even be demonstrated in some cases. The Philosophers'

Circle, a Hellenistic group of limestone portraits set up in the Serapeum at Saqqara and later a close neighbour of the Monastery of Apa Jeremias, thus appears to have been

re-erected in Late Antiquity, perhaps in the fourth century.343 Furthermore, Christian funerary iconography drew directly on earlier traditions, and the textiles of the period show a similar preference for traditional designs and iconography. In the Egyptian

literature of the period, we have authors such as Nonnus of Panopolis, writing in the

late fourth or early fifth century and whose *Dionysiaca* spans 48 books, and Dioscorus of Aphrodito, active in the sixth century.344 We do not know the religious affiliation 341 As documented in Winlock & Crum 1926's tour de force study of this region in the sixth and seventh centuries, 3-24.

342 Bagawat necropolis (seemingly in use from the second to the seventh century): Fakhry 1951; Zibawi 2005. At Bagawat, later acts of mutilation also appear to be rooted in conceptions of embodied images. In Chapel 175, for example, a cross has defaced the eyes, mouth, and nose of a figure, whereas two lines cut across the neck and thighs may be suggestive of further bodily punishment (see Zibawi 2005: pl. II, 1-2). On eremitic cells at Esna, see Sauneron 1972 and subsequent volumes.

343 Lauer & Picard 1955: 6-7. On the Philosophers' Circle, refer to Ashton 2003: 14-24; 89-95; Bagnall

& Rathbone 2004: 100-101.

344 On Dioscorus, refer to MacCoull 1988.

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of Nonnos, but Dioscorus was certainly a Christian. Both authors attest to the *paideia* and the positive interest in the past that also was part of late antique society in Egypt.

Interpreted through the prism of response, a story of the desert father Anoub illus-

trates well the ambiguity inherent in many Christian attitudes towards the past in Egypt as well as the persistent conception of images as powerful agents.345 Anoub lived with three other monks in a converted temple at Terenouthis, modern Kom Abu Billo on the

western outskirts of the Delta. In this temple-cum-monastery stood a pagan statue at

which Anoub threw rocks in the morning, only to beg for its forgiveness in the evening.

The anecdote is mainly given as a rhetorical tool (as a metaphor for Anoub's monastic

community that should "be like this statue, which is not moved whether one beats it

or whether one flatters it"),346 but his daily performance of this stone-throwing ritual can be seen as suggestive of the ambiguous ways in which early Christian communities

engaged with pagan images. It is furthermore another example of how pagan images

came to be used both creatively and treacherously in Christian rhetoric.

Finally, should the Egyptian evidence be seen as unique, given our extensive knowl-

edge of earlier traditions of visual culture and the distinctive source materials that are not found elsewhere? Can it be used to illuminate Christian responses to pagan images

elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean? While some of the visual practices that can be observed in Egypt are highly unique due to the country's history, the relevance of embodied images is by no means limited to this context. This is shown not only by recent research on the destruction of images during the medieval period, but also by the wide variety of anthropological and historical case studies discussed in the preceding chapter.

Late antique Egypt is important in this history of response, as it shows how modes of

viewing could inform physical responses in a number of culturally significant ways.

345 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Anoub*, 1, pp. 32-33, ed. Ward. On this episode, see also Brakke 2008: 100-101.

346 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Anoub*, 1, ed. Ward, 28.

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CHAPTER 3

Re-Imagining Idols: Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in the Urban Spaces of the Near East

Theodoret informed readers of his *Church History* that the destruction of the Alexandrian Serapeum inspired a wave of similar episodes of religious violence across the Mediterranean. Although easily overemphasized, the events in Alexandria certainly did have an impact on the rhetoric of Christianization in the late antique Near East.1 In one of his letters, Jerome expressed what he saw as the imminent Christian triumph over one of the region's most prominent sanctuaries with direct reference to the events in Alexandria: "already the Egyptian Serapis has been made a Christian; while at Gaza Marnas mourns in confinement and every moment expects to see his temple overturned."2

Later, Jerome also juxtaposed the Serapeum and the Marneion in a triumphalistic passage from a commentary on the Book of Isaiah dating to

411: “the Serapeum at Alexandria

and the temple of Marnas at Gaza have risen up again into churches of the Lord.”3

The destruction of the Marneion indeed came to take a pivotal role in the Chris-

tianization of Gaza when Porphyry became the city’s bishop and consolidated his au-

thority by the miraculously swift erection of a basilica church, as discussed in Chapter 1. Throughout the Near East, the destruction of idols was part of similarly powerful

narratives of Christian ‘triumph’, a topos that permeated Christian writings on the religious and social changes that were under way. This is, for example, evident in a story in *The Heroic Deeds of Mar Rabbula* in which the young protagonist decided to go to Baalbek (Heliopolis), known to Theodoret as a “city of demons,” to destroy the idols

in the temples there and then subsequently to suffer the death of a martyr at the hands of the pagans. That a mission such as Rabbula’s could be dangerous and even lethal is

noteworthy, given that Constantine had already intervened in the city’s religious affairs 1

Finding an appropriate name for this region that fits its cultural complexity is no easy matter. I use the term ‘Near East’ here to refer to (roughly) the areas of modern Syria, Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon. On the region’s cultural and social history, refer to Sartre 2005.

2 “Jam Aegyptus Serapis factus est Christianus. Marnas Gazae luget inclusus, et eversionem templi jugiter pertinescit.” *Epist.* , 107, trans. Fremantle, Lewis, & Martley.

3 Quoted from *The Life of Porphyry, Bishop of Gaza*, trans. G. F. Hill, xxxvii–viii.

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Fig. 3.1. *The precinct of the so-called Temple of Aphrodite, Baalbek (photo: author).*

and erected a large basilica on the site of the Temple of Aphrodite (Fig. 3.1).4 Even in the time of Justinian, we hear of cultic activity in the temples at Baalbek. This suggests that the Christians of the late antique Near East had to negotiate the sculptural landscape in a variety of creative ways that occasionally necessitated a process of re-imagining the role and function of pagan idols.

The aim of this chapter is to give closer attention to the local circumstances of

Christianization and responses to pagan sculpture in order to unpack the rhetoric of

the Christian authors. The Near East is a region where we are able to follow late antique religious and social transformation with a great amount of detail, given the rich ness of 4 Euseb.,

Vit. Const. 3.58. On the Christianization of Baalbek, see also Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5.29; Kaegi 1966: 258-259; Liebeschuetz 1977: 486-490; Hajjar 1985: 379-383; Emmel, Gotter, & Hah n 2008: 1. Theodoret tells us of the iconoclastic activities (and tragic fate) of the deacon Cyril at Baalbek (*Hist. eccl.* , 3.7). According to Joh n Malalas, Theodosius I destroyed the Temple of Jupiter there (*Chronicle*, 13.344).

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Map of sites in the Roman Near East discussed in Chapter 3 (map by Eva Mortensen).

Fig. 3.2.

the historical and archaeological evidence at major sites such as Scythopolis, Palmyra, Caesarea Maritima, and Caesarea Philippi (Fig. 3.2). This chapter accordingly turns

to these sites to look at how Christian communities in this part of the Mediterranean

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responded to pagan sculpture. Compared with the often highly rhetorical texts, the archaeology provides a complementary view that is both complex and difficult to interpret. In contrast to the Egyptian case (with the exception of Alexandria), the focus of this chapter is distinctively urban as it considers the changing meanings of pagan

statues within the cityscape, which leads to a discussion of the display of fragments and mutilated statuary as an aspect of contemporary memory politics. Not all of the sites

that I focus on here have been equally well explored archaeologically, nor is statuary plentiful everywhere. Yet the evidence that we do have suggests a range of quite different Christian responses that changed in significant ways over the centuries and were

dependent on the local contexts of religious and social change.

This chapter does not attempt to provide a full survey of relevant sites. Instead,

it offers a series of case studies of Christian response to pagan statuary in the Near East. The examples that are discussed have been chosen primarily to provide thematic

unity. The region's diversity in religious practices and representational cultures also necessitates some introductory comments that are given in the chapter's first section.

The two sections that follow discuss sites that have yielded relevant and important

archaeological evidence. One of the most intriguing aspects of the late antique Near

East is the degree to which urban centres flourished during the period. I therefore

turn to Palmyra and Scythopolis to look at how Christian response could be embed-

ded in two quite different environments of late antique urban continuity; both have

been illuminated by recent archaeological fieldwork. In the following section, I focus on pagan sculpture in the contested cityscapes of Caesarea Maritima and Caesarea

Philippi to explore how pagan idols came to be used in Christian discourses of the

Other (in both rhetoric and the physical environment) and in conflicts with the pagan

communities in these urban centres. This discussion will aim to highlight the degree

to which late antique viewers were able to re-interpret and indeed re-imagine pagan

statues in the cityscape.

Approaching the Near East

The Roman and late antique Near East demonstrates a great variety of religious prac-

tices, blending both distinctively local (as well as regional) traditions with traits that are more commonly known from a broader Mediterranean perspective.5 This complex

religious diversity is reflected in a very varied sculptural landscape that was influenced by strong local identities as well as local traditions of craftsmanship and access to stone.

Locally produced sculpture in the region thus reflects local traditions and aesthetics as well as religious needs and requirements. The sculptural landscape of the region was

furthermore shaped by a continuous dialogue on the nature of divine representation

that manifested itself in Jewish and Semitic religions and, later, Christianity and Islam.

5 On the diversity of Near Eastern religious practice, see Drijvers 1980 (on Edessa); Belayche 2001

(on Palestine), Kaizer 2002 (on Palmyra), 2008 (various contributions, and see esp. Kaizer's introduction).

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This dialogue and its historical trajectory over several centuries again underlines the importance of looking very closely at the local contexts of Christian responses in Late Antiquity, and this section will accordingly

focus on how local religious practices influenced the representational cultures of the Near East.

An important aspect of the religious life of the Near East is the apparent avoidance

of figural representation in certain parts of the region.6 In theory, Jews shunned all kinds of figural representation to the degree that they were not allowed to enter buildings that housed idols, let alone have any kind of physical contact with them. The Second

Temple period (516 B.C.–A.D. 70) is often regarded as a time when Jewish views towards figural representation fully complied with the Second Commandment. These religious

regulations would effectively have prevented Jews from participating in the political

and social life of the major urban centres of Palestine. From the first century onwards, Jewish attitudes to images seemingly resulted in considerable tensions with the Roman

authorities, which tried to import their own particular set of visual practices.

However, recent scholarship has shown the degree to which Jews were able not only

to negotiate such images within the cityscape, but also to appropriate figural representation in the Classical tradition in a number of different contexts.7 This scholarship has been based on new analyses of both texts and archaeological finds of figural mosaics

in synagogues as well as sculpture from urban sites.8 Certain images, wall paintings,

and figural mosaics were permitted, although three-dimensional sculpture was always a

more problematic category in the eyes of Jewish viewers.9 These studies have further-

more shown that Jewish authors, notably Josephus, had to strike a delicate rhetorical

balance between religious sentiments and an apologetic attitude towards Roman rule,

commonly represented by means of sculptural display, as evident from the well-known

furor concerning the erection of a portrait of Caligula in the Jerusalem Temple.

The archaeological evidence from synagogues also demonstrates that Jewish reli-

gious doctrine on representation could be interpreted very differently from place to

place. The depictions of Helios and a zodiac in the nave mosaic of the synagogue at

Hammat Tiberias, dated to the late third or early fourth century, certainly pushed the limits of Jewish representational culture.10 Jewish views changed over time as well. The 6 On aniconism in the Roman Near East, see Gaifman 2008. For a broader study of Roman aniconism, see Reeder 1995.

7 See also the remarks in the Introduction on the Synagogue at Dura-Europos. On Jewish responses to sculpture, see Tromp 1995; Eliav 2000; 2002; 2008. On late antique Jewish attitudes to figural representations, see Goodman 2003.

8 The Jewish author Josephus, who wrote under the patronage of the Flavian dynasty, has long been regarded as professing a hard-line view on figural art, yet this rhetoric of iconoclasm has recently begun to be

unpicked and put into a larger context. On the complexity of Josephus's views, see Von Ehrenkrook 2011. On figural art in Jewish contexts (including detailed readings of specific aspects of the use of iconography), see Hachlili 1989: 285-316; Foerster 2008: 72-73. See also Fine 2005 on Jewish art.

9 Fine 2000: 186. See also Blidstein 1974; Eliav 2002; 2008.

10 Fine 2000: 187. On the zodiac in Jewish art, see Hachlili 1988: 301-307.

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second and third centuries generally saw a much wider integration of Hellenism and its repertoire of images than the Second Temple period. It is also clear that the Jewish opposition to statuary at this time was mainly directed towards those images that were worshipped as part of the imperial cult.11 In this context, it is interesting to note that the majority of sculpture from the region is mythological in subject matter, and that

very few portraits have been found.12

Discussions of Nabatean art have frequently pointed to another supposed regional

tradition of aniconism. The Nabateans established a kingdom centred on what in mod-

ern terms is southern Syria and Jordan, but their area of influence extended along the Red Sea to Yemen. The evidence put forward by Strabo that figural images were not

produced by the Nabateans has been accepted by scholars such as Joseph Patrich.13

Although Nabatean art is not entirely devoid of figural representations, they are indeed rare. Yet Nabatean religion was not opposed to all material and visual manifestations of cult, as numerous baetyls, *stelae* (in various degrees of stylization), and even a number of figurative cult statues have been found.14 Nabatean religion thus cannot be simply

described as being aniconic, as it incorporated many aspects of figural representation, even before Hellenistic and Roman influence resulted in the introduction of sculpture

employing Classical styles in the first century B.C.15 Patrich suggested that regions

under Nabatean influence fostered their own episodes of pre-Christian destruction of

images, notably at Petra.16 According to Patrich, this iconoclasm (in the true sense

of the word) should be dated to the first century, particularly the reign of Malichus

II (*c*. 40-70). Disconcertingly, this indigenous destruction of the figural decoration of monuments, such as the Khazna, has instead been attributed to Christian or Muslim

agency by some commentators.17

11 Eliav 2002; Foerster 2008: 73-74.

12 Foerster 2008: 77.

13 See Patrich 1990a; 1990b on the non-figural tendencies of Nabatean art, but see also Gaifman 2008: 57-67 for a critical review of Patrich's position. Strabo on the lack of Nabatean images: *Strab.* , 16.4.26. On Nabatean cult imagery, see Healey 2001: 155-158.

14 On

baetyls, see Gaifman 2008; Stewart 2008b. On figurative cult statuary, see especially the assemblage from Khirbet et-Tannur in McKenzie 2003b.

15 Gaifman 2008: 67.

16 Patrich 1990a: 153-157; 1990b: 190-191. According to the author, this destruction was very thorough in that it also affected sites that were difficult to access, yet it only impacted those parts of images that were deemed to be unacceptable. Ornamentation with flowers and various architectural motifs were left unscathed.

17 See Tsafrir 2008: 131. Lyttelton & Blagg commented on the state of the sculpture from the *temenos* of Qasr el-Bint at Petra that "many of the figured pieces of sculpture have been deliberately mutilated, whether by Moslem or Christian iconoclasts" (1990: 269). Parr 1968: 10-11 discusses the mutilation of figural representations on tomb facades at Petra. The Urn Tomb was converted to a church before 447 and its sculptural decoration may have been mutilated at this stage. However, Parr suggests that the majority of the mutilation dates to after the middle of the eighth century.

He also proposes that foot-holds (clearly visible at the Khazna or "Treasury") were installed by iconoclasts on tomb facades to reach otherwise inaccessible decoration (1968: 11, n. 28).

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Hand of colossal statue from Temple of Hercules, Amman Archaeological Museum (photo: author).

Fig. 3.3.

In other parts of the Near East, we can observe a very long tradition of figural representation; the sculptural output from these places testifies to a fusion of different styles and iconographies. Sites such as Dura-Europos are very rich in sculptural finds, testimony to the cultural exchange with the east and Parthian Hatra in particular. Sculpture in the round was rarer at Palmyra, although there may have been many further examples

in bronze that have not survived to this day.18 At Palmyra, there also appears to have been a preference for using reliefs as cult images (something which we also saw in the case of mithraea in Chapter 1), as suggested by the rarity of architectural features for the display of statues within temples.19 Limestone niches played a major part of ritual devotion within sanctuaries, although this tradition appears to have declined from the first century onwards.

The marble sculpture that has been found in the Near East was imported from other

regions, especially Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy. The degree to which marble was chosen for sculptural display varied widely from region to region. In Palmyra, only a handful of marble statues have been discovered; it was more commonly employed at significantly

Hellenized urban centres such as Scythopolis, Caesarea Maritima, and Apamea.20 For

18 Gawlikowski 2008: 403.

19 Colledge 1976: 31-32. On cult niches, see also Collart & Vicari 1969: 156-162; 169-171.

20 Honorific marble statues from the senate house, agora, and baths of Palmyra: Colledge 1976: 91-92; pls. 125-126, 128.

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these cities, statues in the Classical tradition came to embody some of the same civic virtues as elsewhere in the Roman world; this is evident, for example, from the fact that several of the coins minted by Scythopolis featured depictions of cult images displayed in the city's temples.21 In Amman (Philadelphia), a third-century colossal marble cult statue, originally some 13 m tall, stood in the so-called Temple of Hercules on the citadel hill (Fig. 3.3).22 However, limestone remained the most predominant material for the

production of sculpture throughout the period under discussion here. In the Hauran,

basalt was the most widely used material, sometimes resulting in a characteristically local appearance of geographically more widespread types, such as cuirassed statues. While

familiar in subject and iconography to all Romans, these must have appeared very different due to the black colour of the stone.23 Christian responses to these darkly coloured cult images may have been influenced by demonology, which usually connected demons

with the colour black.24 In the *Epistle of Barnabas,* for instance, the Devil is known as

"the Black One," and in the *Vita* of the bishop Marcellus of Apamea, a black demon makes an appearance.25 In medieval wallpaitings, demons are commonly depicted with

black skin.

One of the most interesting glimpses into the visual practices of the Near East dur-

ing the Roman period is *De Dea Syria (On the Syrian Goddess)*, dating to the second century and attributed to Lucian of Samosata.26 While this text is as problematic as it is intriguing, it is the most vivid description that we have of the visual practices of Near Eastern sanctuaries during the Roman period. It claims to be an eyewitness account of

cultic activities at Hierapolis (modern Membij) in northern Syria, but presents numer-

ous problems of interpretation. Firstly, there is the issue of authorship. Its attribution has been exhaustively debated, but never resolved. Some scholars have thus taken an

extreme position that rejects the text's credibility as a source for discussions of religious practices.27 Other scholars have stressed the cult's seemingly Semitic features, pointing out that it bears no traces of Hellenization. The text has thus only been seen as useful for the purposes

of studying its Near Eastern context (the author identifies himself as an Assyrian). This view was strongly criticized by Per Bilde who, in an important article, stressed that the cult of Atargatis as portrayed in Lucian's text demonstrates Hellenistic influence, not least in the composite character of its religious practices.28 The view 21 On the coinage of Scythopolis, see Barkay 2003.

22 Kanellopoulos 1994: 82, 100-103; Weber 2002: 511-512, cat. no. D2.

23 A Dionysus in basalt from the sanctuary at Sheikh Sa'ad could have engendered a similar response from outsiders (Weber 2008: 389-392).

24 The association of the colour black with demons came to be pronounced in medieval art, see e.g.

Strickland 2003.

25 *Epistle of Barnabas*, 4, and *Life of Marcellus*, 6-7 (ed. Latyšev 1914, 123-124).

26 Lightfoot 2003.

27 But see Dirven 1997. Oden 1977: 157 similarly concludes that "the value of the *De Syria Dea* for the task of reconstructing the religion of Hierapolis is no longer to be doubted."

28 Bilde 1990, and discussed further in Lightfoot 2003: *passim*. The modern reception of the text thus fits a familiar picture: many of those aspects of visual practices in the Greek and Roman world **204**

Chapter 3

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taken here is that *De Dea Syria* provides valuable insights into visual practices of one particular Syrian sanctuary in the Roman period, but

should be treated to the same kind of source critical readings as other surviving texts from Antiquity.29 Given Hierapolis'

status as a site of pilgrimage, it is also likely that the religious practices that took place there were familiar to audiences outside Syria.30

The cult at Hierapolis was centred on the worship of a divine couple, Atargatis/Dea

Syria (who the author identifies as Hera, but also compares with seven other goddesses) and the slightly overshadowed Hadad (identified as Zeus by the author).31 He begins

with a short detour to a number of Lebanese sanctuaries that allow him to place the

sanctuary of Heliopolis (Baalbek) as the most sacred and greatest in importance, stating that Heliopolis has "costly works and ancient dedications and many marvels and images

worthy of divinity."32 These *xoana* are described in an extensive *ekphrasis*. First, however, there is a description of the sanctuary and its setting on a hill, including the two famous Dionysiac *phallus*-poles that received votive offerings of wooden figurines and were climbed twice a year, as a possible predecessor of the Christian stylite columns.33

The author is keen to evoke the sensuous qualities of a visit to the temple, gleaming

with gold and smelling strongly of various perfumes and odours from the distant lands

of Arabia.34 The golden cult statues of Atargatis and Hadad are located within an inner chamber of the temple, which only certain members of the priesthood were allowed

to enter.35 They are described at great length in a passage that highlights their global fame, as well as the complex meshing of objects (in this case

particularly jewellery, but also sceptre and *lych nis*), light (lamps, golden coating of the statues, the radiance of the *lych nis*, and so on), and space (the gaze of the statue followed you as you moved around it) in orchestrating divine presence, similar to what was observed in the case of two

sanctuaries in Rome in Chapter 1.36 The heavy ornamentation points to what is known

that give objects and images agency and strange ritual properties have frequently been ascribed to a perceived foreignness of that particular cult – or even completely marginalized due to the spurious nature of a text.

29 The author drew on the knowledge of locals, whose stories he is explicitly skeptical about: τοὺς

ἐγὼ πάντας μὲν ἐρέω, δέκομαι δὲ οὐδαμά (*De Dea Syria*, 11).

30 On

De Dea Syria as a pilgrimage text, see Lightfoot 2005.

31 While Hierapolis is practically an archaeological blank, reliefs and other depictions of the two divinities have been unearthed at other sites, see Lightfoot 2003: 16-38.

32 ἔνι δὲ ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἔργα πολυτελέα καὶ ἀρχαῖα ἀναθήματα καὶ πολλὰ θωύματα καὶ ξόανα

θεοπρεπέα (*De Dea Syria*, 10, trans. Lightfoot).

33 *De Dea Syria*, 28-29.

34 *De Dea Syria*, 30 .

35 *De Dea Syria*, 31. This brings to mind Jewish practices in relation to the Temple of Jerusalem, see also Lightfoot 2003: 433. Limitation of access is an important means of ensuring a specifically devout form of

visual engagement, as discussed also in relation to Egyptian temples, cf. Chapter 2, “Approaching Egypt.”

36 *De Dea Syria*, 32. 31-40 is a lengthy discussion of the sanctuary’s sculptural decoration. On the

“viewing” of the cult statues, see also Elsner 2007: 19-22. Note also the important discussion of these passages on the cult images in Lightfoot’s commentary (2003: 434-476).

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from cross-cultural contexts – including the aforementioned Egyptian case – where cult statues are covered in jewellery and precious metals, the treatment of each addition to the statue being heavily ritualized.37 In other passages, the roles of the cult images in rituals (including so-called “descents to the lake”) are described.38 The visual practices that can be identified in the Near East thus resonate with those that were prevalent in other regions while at the same time bearing evidence of local religious needs and traditions.

Christianization and Memory in the Late Antique Near East

Even in the Near East, the epicentre of early Christianity, the process of Christianization followed diverging trajectories.39 At Apamea, for example, Christianity was slow

to make progress, whereas Edessa became Christian at a relatively early date – yet even there, a pagan spring festival was held in the late fifth century.40 At Harran, a site very close to Edessa, there is no evidence of a resident bishop until 361, and the city was apparently not even totally devoid of idolatry in the eighth century, if we are to believe the Christian

sources.41 This attests to the very local circumstances that made up the process of Christianization and is suggestive once again of the localized contexts in

which Christian response is to be interpreted. Furthermore, once a city or region had

developed a hegemonic Christian community, the responses to the pagan past and its

material manifestations were rarely uniform in character.42 An intriguing case showing a very different kind of response from destruction or mutilation is that of a mosaic

with a scene of Orpheus charming the beasts as its main motif that was discovered in

Jerusalem in 1901, which is now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum.43 When the

room was later adapted for Christian use, an apse was simply added. The floor of this

apse was decorated with a mosaic depicting a cross. In this fashion, the space and pagan image had been appropriated for Christian use without any damage to the physical

fabric or its decoration.44

At the other end of the spectrum are those texts that demonstrate hostility towards

the more problematic category of three-dimensional pagan sculpture, some as part of

anti-pagan rhetoric, and others more obviously grounded in historical events. Cyril of 37 Tambiah 1984: 255, and see Chapter 2, “Approaching Egypt.”

38 *De Dea Syria*, 47.

39 On Christianization and the persistence of paganism in the Near East, see Liebeschuetz 1977; Drijvers 1982; Van Dam 1985; Krentz 1992; Trombley 1995: I, 188-245 (Gaza); II, 134-204 (Syrian countryside); Callot 1997; Kidner 2001; Holum 2003a; Tsafrir 2003; Sivan 2008.

40 On the process of Christianization at Edessa, see Drijvers 1982: 36-39. Drijvers concludes that this process was "more a matter of continuity of culture in which no sudden changes or breaks occur, only gradual shifts" (p. 39). On religious practice in Edessa, see also Drijvers 1980.

41 Segal 1955: 124-125.

42 For a general study of the fate of sculpture in late antique Palestine, see Tsafrir 2008.

43 On this mosaic, see Ovadiah & Mucznik 1981. The authors propose that there were two stages in the use of the building in which the mosaic was placed, one with a pagan character (fourth or early fifth century) and one with a Christian character (second half of the fifth century).

44 On the "Christian Orpheus," see Huskinson 1996.

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Head of Bacchus from Mamre

Fig. 3.4.

(after Mader 1957: Taf. LXXIV).

Jerusalem, writing in the mid-fourth century, linked idolatry to a specifically pagan set of visual practices and defined the worship of the devil as consisting "of prayer in the temples of idols, the honouring of lifeless images, the lighting of lamps or the burning of incense by springs or streams."45 Of course, this description follows many of the

topoi that we have encountered throughout this study. In his homily *On the Fall of Idols*, Jacob of Sarug (*c*. 451-521) offered a regional catalogue of idol worship, describing the cults of numerous cities of the Near East and claiming that they were all created

by Satan to erase the memory of God.46 In one scene, the voice of God shatters the

pagan idols which fall from their columns, but there is very little on human agency in 45 Λατρεία δέ ἐστι διαβόλου, ἡ ἐν εἰδωλίοις εὐχή· τὰ πρὸς τιμὴν γινόμενα τῶν ἀψύχων εἰδώλων·

τὸ ἅπτειν λύχνους, ἢ θυμιᾶν παρὰ πηγὰς ἢ ποταμούς (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Lecture*, 1.8, trans. McCauley & Stephenson). Note here the similarity to Shenoute's condemnation of Gesios' idol worship.

46 The main edition of Jacob's *On the Fall of Idols* is still Martin 1875 (with French translation). See also Vandenhoff 1915; Drijvers 1980: 37-38.

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Jacob's description of divine destruction.47 The entire homily is enveloped in triumphal language and rhetorical constructions of idolatry.

Other episodes are more directly connected to contemporary historical events. Many

of these pertain to the anti-pagan activities of bishops, but imperial sponsorship may also be identifiable in the archaeological record. German excavations at Mamre between 1926 and 1928 uncovered extensive remains, ranging in date from pre-Herodianic to

Arabic times, and including a Constantinian basilica church that was erected to sup-

press the pagan cult that had been active at the site, at least according to the textual sources. The excavations only uncovered a small number of sculptural fragments in the

foundations underneath the Constantinian basilica. Two of these came from a head of

Bacchus (Fig. 3.4). The excavators noted that the head had been destroyed by a brutal

blow.48 Another key figure is Maternus Cynegius, Praetorian Prefect of the East during the reign of Theodosius I.49 It is the behaviour of his supporters that Libanius criticized in *Pro Templis*. Libanius' description of raging monks fits surprisingly well with Theodoret's portrayal of Bishop Marcellus' attack on the Temple of Zeus Belos in the centre of Apamea in 386, with some 1000 imperial soldiers and local labourers assisting in the destruction.50 Additionally, the archaeological remains of the temple, excavated by the Belgian team, appear to confirm Marcellus' thorough measures in razing the temple to

the ground.51 The destructive efforts of monks are generally also evident in other parts of the Near East.52

Overall, archaeological finds generally support the picture of a wide spectrum of

Christian responses to pagan sculpture in the late antique Near East. I have already

discussed a head of Zeus/Asklepios from Gerasa that may have been re-interpreted as

Christ in a fifth-century church (Fig. 0.6), suggestive of a response rooted in a seeming appropriation of the past, similar to the example of the Orpheus mosaic at Jerusalem.

In other cases, statuary was carefully deposited, perhaps for safekeeping or, alternatively, as a means of exorcising any demonic powers that an image may have been thought to

possess. One possible example of this is a well-preserved statuette of Europa from Hama and now in Damascus.53 It was found in an upright position together with two busts

of Serapis inside a *temenos* area. This positioning as well as its good preservation may suggest that it was buried for safekeeping, although the find of Arab storage jars show that the small cache of statuary was disturbed in the 13th century. In her publication of this find, Gunhild Ploug gives a broad dating range for the deposition of the cache, 47 *On the Fall of Idols*, trans. Martin 1875: 135.

48 Mader 1957: 136.

49 On Maternius Cynegius, see Matthews 1967; Gassowska 1982: 119-122.

50 Theodoret,

Hist. eccl. , 5.21; Sozomen, *Hist. eccl*., 7.16. See also Trombley 1995: I, 123-129; and Balty 1997 for modification of Trombley's arguments in light of recent work by the Belgian archaeological mission at Apamea.

51 Balty 1997: 797-798.

52 Frend 1990; Trombley 1995: I, 143-150.

53 Ploug 1985: 79, 114, 120, 190-192.

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from the reign of Constantine II to the Theodosian period, based on the evidence of the Theodosian Code.

A large corpus of mutilated and fragmentary sculpture can be compiled from the

region.54 Several instances, including the mutilation of divinities and priests on the facade of a temple at Chhîm (Lebanon) where Polish archaeologists have followed urban

and religious change up until the site's abandonment in the eighth century, are likely to be connected to the local circumstances of Christianization.55 The temple appears to

have been abandoned (but not violently destroyed) by the fifth century. Immediately

facing the temple, a Christian basilica was constructed around the same time. Here, the Christian responses specifically targeted imagery relating to idolatry but did not destroy the temple itself, which was continuously part of the sacred landscape, a situation that is mirrored at Hosn-Niha in the Bekaa.56 In this case, the so-called Temple A, having

been abandoned in the fourth or fifth century, was destroyed in an earthquake in 551. A church was then constructed immediately on its monumental staircase where the altar

would have originally stood.

More generally, establishing a date for when sculptural materials were broken is no

less difficult than in Egypt or other parts of the Mediterranean. Firstly, there are several documented cases of Jewish iconoclasm in the sixth and seventh centuries (that in turn may have been influenced by changes in Islamic and Christian attitudes towards images).

One very extensive example of this kind of response is found in the sixth-century Na'aran synagogue, north of Jericho.57 In its present state, it is clear that all representations of animals and other living things have been thoroughly and systematically mutilated. The Menorah, however, went completely unscathed. This treatment can best be ascribed

to Jewish iconoclasts who, while objecting to the figural representations, remained respectful of this important symbol of Judaism.58 Jewish iconoclasts also frequently and carefully avoided inscriptions, as they did not hold the same connotations of idolatry.59

The careful and selective targeting of images has been seen in general as a trait of

Jewish iconoclasm.60 For example, all faces on a mosaic in the House of Dionysus at

54 See esp. Foerster 2008; Tsafrir 2008; Trombley 2008; Pollini 2008.

55 Waliszewski 2009: 100-101.

56 Yasmine 2009: 134-141.

57 Vincent 1961 (with several high quality plates demonstrating the extent of the destruction); Fine 2000: 189-190.

58 Avoiding defacing the Menorah or the shrine of the Torah is a general characteristic of Jewish iconoclasm, according to Fine 2000: 189-190. In the case of the decoration of a marble chancel screen from Tiberias, dated

to the fifth or sixth century, two fish were defaced while the Menorah was again left unscathed; see Fine 2000: 190.

59 Avi-Yonah 1981b: 375.

60 Fine 2000: 189. The most extensive overview of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim iconoclasm is Schick 1995: 180-219, listing damage to mosaics in various contexts, although he is not interested in the fate of pagan monuments per se. On Jewish iconoclasm in synagogues, see also Levine 2000: 340-343 for a useful summary of previous scholarship.

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Sepphoris have been systematically eradicated, whereas the bodies remain untouched.61

The targeting of eyes has also been noted in a number of cases, again primarily on mo-

saics.62 A lot of Jewish iconoclasm is, however, easily recognizable because of its desire to maintain the integrity of the mosaics and the buildings they are found in. Figurative or otherwise offensive motifs were thus replaced by geometric patterns or white *tesserae* with non-figural motifs.63 This treatment eliminates the figural representations while upholding the physical fabric of sacred spaces, a response comparable with the treatment of images on Egyptian temples, where relief imagery (carved in negative) even

when destroyed stands out immediately to the viewer. The careful removal of figurative motifs is also attested in some Christian churches, for example, the fifth-century church at Khirbat ‘Asida, north of Hebron, where heads, necks, and feet were replaced with

plain, white *tesserae*.64

Another much discussed development in the late antique history of visual culture in

the Near East was the edict issued in 721 by the Umayyad caliph Yazid II that banned

the representation of human beings.65 Islamic occupation at some sites has thus been

used to suggest a late date for the destruction of their mosaic decoration. The deliberate damage to figures of birds and fish on a mosaic in the basilica at the monastery at Kursi near the Sea of Galilee has been attributed to the Muslim occupation of the site in the ninth century.66 More than anywhere else, such statements have a political dimension,

and it is very problematic to connect such damage to Islamic hostility towards images, not least since Robert Schick has shown that cases of iconoclasm in Islamic buildings

with figural representation are rare.67 Five years later after Yazid II's edict, the Byzantine emperor Leo III issued a similar ban on figural representations. The relationship between these two bans has been widely debated, but in this context it is sufficient to observe that there were two simultaneous regimes of iconoclasm in the eighth-century Near

East that had an effect on the archaeological record. Naturally, this complicates efforts to date specific incidents of the destruction and mutilation of images in the region.

Acts of iconoclasm and vandalism continue to this day in some parts of the Near

East. In 1965, the mosaic floor of a synagogue was discovered at Gaza by the Egyptian

61 Talgam & Weiss 2004 (esp. 47-106); Weiss 2008: 567-568, fig. 2. On the targeting of faces in the paintings in the Dura-Europos synagogue, see Kelley 1994 (arguing that Romans, rather than Jews, were responsible for this damage).

62 Fine 2000: 189.

63 See e.g. Bowersock 2006: 101-102. Noteworthy examples can be found in mosaics at Tiberias and Khirbet Susiya, see Hachlili 1988: 305; pl. 75; Fine 2000: 190. This treatment is not altogether different from Byzantine cases where figural imagery was replaced by a cross, as seen in Thessaloniki, Constantinople, and Iznik.

64 Baramki & Avi-Yonah 1934.

65 See the discussion of late antique destruction of mosaics in the Near East in Bowersock 2006: 91-111; Hachlili 2009: 209-217.

66 Fine 2000: 189, n. 49. On the Islamic conquest, see Kaegi 1992; Schick 1995. On Muslim-Christian relationships in Late Antiquity with discussion of iconoclasm, see Walmsley 2007: 121-124.

67 Schick 1995: 205.

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Department of Antiquities.68 The most spectacular fragment showed King David in the guise of Orpheus playing the harp. The mosaic was dated by a donor’s inscription

to 508/509. However, it was not until 1967 and after the Six-Day War that systematic

excavations were carried out. In the two years that had passed since the discovery and first excavation, the head of David had been destroyed.69 This is another reminder that the long history of destruction and mutilation of images in the Near East poses one of the main problems to the study of Christian response in the region.

Christian Response in Environments of Urban Continuity: Palmyra and Scythopolis

Some finds of mutilated sculpture, not least from Palmyra and Scythopolis, come from

relatively reliable, datable archaeological contexts that indeed show that such destruction took place before the period of Islamic and Byzantine iconoclasm. This section

will look more closely at these sites and review how the textual sources and archaeology occasionally complement each other in explaining particular Christian attitudes towards the past in Late Antiquity. Both sites, although very different in their social and religious character, were prosperous cities in Late Antiquity, and it is therefore possible to look at the ways in which Christian responses to pagan images unfolded within different

environments of urban continuity where many of aspects of social and public life in

the cities were still intact.70

The Life and Afterlife of a Goddess at Palmyra

Palmyra, the famous caravan city of the Syrian Desert, is well known for its distinctive expressions of cultural and religious identity in its art and architecture. The city's prosperity was in large part due to its role in the eastern trade and its oasis location.71 It experienced a turbulent third century with Zenobia's rebellion against Rome, followed

by its capture in 272 by the troops of Aurelian. Diocletian consolidated the Roman

presence with the construction of a large military camp in the western part of the city, the so-called Camp of Diocletian.72 Palmyra's process of Christianization is not known in much detail, but it is certain that there was a Christian community with a bishop

68 Ovadiah 1969; 1982. The mosaic as found (with head of King David intact) is depicted in Ovadiah 1969: pl. 15A; 1982: 130.

69 The mosaic has now been restored and is in the possession of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Recent reports from Gaza are indicative of further threats of iconoclasm. A statue of the naked Venus in the collections of the Gaza Archaeological Museum is currently on permanent loan to Geneva since Hamas thinks it is immodest (Milstein 2009).

70 On urban continuity in the late antique Near East, see Walmsley 1996.

71 On Palmyra and its art and architecture, see Colledge 1976; Schmidt-Colinet 2005; and above,

"Approaching the Near East." On Palmyrene religion and its iconography, see also Drijvers 1976a (richly illustrated). On the city's temples, see Gawlikowski 1973; Seyrig, Amy, & Will 1975. On urban development at Palmyra, see Schlumberger 1935; Yon 2001.

72 Excavated by a Polish team from the 1960s onwards, see Michałowski 1960; 1962; 1963; 1964; Gawlikowski 1984.

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sometime before 388-392.73 Recent excavations have furthermore discovered an early Christian church located in the central district of the city.74 Although presumably

somewhat diminished in size and importance in Late Antiquity, Palmyra still thrived,

as is shown by the discovery of Umayyad shops on the colonnaded street and, most

recently, a mosque.75 The whole area of the Camp of Diocletian was in Byzantine and

Arab times built up with houses, indicating that commercial and religious life continued in the caravan city.76 Clearly further discoveries are still to be made and will undoubtedly increase our knowledge of late antique Palmyra and the nature of religious interaction during this period.

The Temple of Bel, originally dedicated in 32 and Palmyra's most important sanctuary,

is demonstrative of the multiple phases of religious change that the city went through over the course of Late Antiquity.77 The temple was pillaged in 273 by the troops of

Aurelian, but then restored. In the fourth or fifth century, it was converted to a church, more or less contemporaneously with the conversion of the Temple of Baalshamin.78

During the reign of Justinian, the *naos* was decorated with a series of mural paintings, including a representation of Christ.79 The church was abandoned sometime before

728. In the 12th century, the first mosque was constructed. The second mosque, dating

to the 14th century and restored in the late 19th, was removed between 1930 and 1932

in preparation for the French archaeological excavations. This complex afterlife of the Temple of Bel, a sacred space for polytheistic and monotheistic religions for almost

2000 years (although not without interruptions), means that it can be very difficult to establish the chronology of the different responses that can be identified among the

temple's rich sculptural decoration.80

However, one sanctuary at Palmyra has provided the kind of datable stratigraphy

that allows us to reconstruct one specific early Christian response to a pagan statue.

The Temple of Allat, a goddess of Semitic origin who was known as Athena in Greek,

73 Trombley 1995: I, 147.

74 Gawlikowski 1993.

75 On the Umayyad *suq*, see Al-Ascad & Stepniowski 1989. On the mosque, see Genequand 2008.

On Islamic Palmyra, see also Assa'd 1993.

76 See Michałowski 1962: 54-77; 1963: 41-61.

77 The Temple of Bel is fully published by Seyrig, Amy, & Will 1975. On the changing religious character (pagan, Christian, and Islamic) of the temple, see ibid.: 157-160. See also Krencker et al. 1932: 127-150.

78 On the Christian conversion of the *cella* of the Temple of Baalshamin, see Gawlikowski 1993: 153; Collart & Vicari 1969: 77-83.

79 On this image of Christ, see Leroy 1965.

80 On some reliefs exhibited today inside the *temenos* of the Temple of Bel, all heads have been obliterated except those that are veiled, see e.g. Seyrig, Amy, & Will 1975: pl. 42,1; Drijvers 1976a: pl. 5. Numerous reliefs from Palmyra and its vicinity attest to a variety of responses, including the selective destruction of body parts (examples in Drijvers 1976a: pls. 46.2; 59, 65, 66.1, 67 – but most of these come with very little contextual data or were found in clandestine excavations).

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Naos of the Temple of Allat Athena, Palmyra (photo: author).

Fig. 3.5.

was discovered within the Camp of Diocletian in 1974-1975 (Fig. 3.5).81 The temple's

original phase dates back to the middle of the first century B.C., but was expanded on a number of occasions, each being commemorated by building inscriptions. In its middle,

second-century phase, the temple was, like the Temple of Bel, a building with essentially two different faces. From the outside, it appeared almost Classical, with Corinthian

capitals and a colonnaded *pronaos*, yet it was an open-air temple like those seen in other Near Eastern contexts, and inside, the cult image was installed in a distinctively local fashion within a tabernacle.82 The temple was destroyed in 272, but then subsequently

restored and integrated into the new Roman military camp. The construction of the

camp had cleared a large area of a suburban necropolis, and sculptural material from

tombs, including a series of ten portrait heads from the same family grave, were reused in the foundations.83 However, it would be very problematic to suggest, as Sauer has

81 On the Polish excavations of Diocletian's Camp and the Temple of Allat, see also Michałowski 1960; 1962; 1963; Gawlikowski 1995. On the cult of Allat in Palmyra, see Drijvers 1976b; Teixidor 1979: 53-62; Kaizer 2002: 99-108. On the sculpture from the sanctuary of Allat, see Gawlikowski 1996; 2008; Friedland 2008.

82 Although the original cult statue has not survived, it is known through replicas; its base, with fittings for the chair of the goddess and two accompanying lions, is still visible in the temple today, see my Fig. 3.5; see also Gawlikowski 2008: 405-406; and 399, fig. 1 for a reconstruction drawing.

83 A large number of sculptural fragments were found within this camp, cf. Michałowski 1960: 82-122; 1962: 124-207; 1963: 110-174. 1964: 28-29; 68-116. The portrait heads were reused as fill in Re-Imagining Idols

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Fig. 3.6. *Guardian lion from the Temple of Allat Athena, reconstructed*

in the Palmyra Museum (photo:

author).

done, that these sculptures were destroyed by Aurelian's troops or even that they were mutilated in the Zenobian conflict.84 Such reuse was commonplace and mirrored the

development at Aphrodisias where, in the mid-fourth century, a city wall was constructed reusing several public and private funerary monuments.85 Pragmatic reasons probably

account for such reuse. Finds such as the portraits that belonged to the same family tomb indeed suggest that this was a case of systematic dismantling, rather than the destructive efforts of Aurelian's troops. Sauer also noted that a colossal sculpture of a lion, 3.5

m tall and made from square blocks, that had guarded the Temple of Allat was reused

in wall foundations dating to the third century (Fig. 3.6). But the square blocks from which this sculpture was made were very convenient for reuse, and it does not seem

to have suffered any kind of deliberate mutilation. Inside the temple, part of another the construction of the 'Grande Porte' at Diocletian's Camp, see Michałowski 1964: 30-32; 91-98.

84 Sauer 2003: 49-50.

85 On the Aphrodisias city wall, see De Staebler 2008. On sculptural finds from the wall, see Smith 2006: 10-11.

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Re-used statue inside the Temple of Allat Athena, Palmyra (photo: author).

Fig. 3.7.

statue was reused as a doorstep (Fig. 3.7), which in this case cannot be interpreted as a case of desecration, as the cult activities continued.

Michał Gawlikowski has proposed that it was in the late third-century phase that

a new, Classical-style cult image of Athena was introduced in the Temple of Allat

(Fig. 3.8).86 This new cult image was over life-size (originally *c*. 3 m in height) and carved in Pentelic marble. Because of the material and comparison with a statue from the

Athenian Agora, Gawlikowski has suggested that it was made by Athenian sculptors.87

It is usually dated to the Antonine period and must therefore originally have been made for display in a different context. In the Temple of Allat, it was displayed underneath a four-column canopy immediately in front of where the old tabernacle had stood. The

cutting for its base is still clearly visible in the temple (Fig. 3.5).

As found by the excavators, it is clear that the statue had suffered deliberate mutilation.88 It was found heavily fragmented and placed face down immediately behind the

canopy.89 The head had been broken into seven pieces and marks on its back suggest

86 Gawlikowski 1996; 2008: 400.

87 Gawlikowski 2008: 410, referring to a similar statue found in the Athenian Agora.

88 Gawlikowski 2008: 409. On the Christian mutilation of the statue, see also Gawlikowski 1975; Gassowska 1982 (suggesting that the head was smashed into eight pieces rather than the seven later reported by Gawlikowski); Trombley 1995: I, 145-147; Sauer 2003: 51-52.

89 See Gassowska 1982: 111, fig. 5 for an image of the statue as found.

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Fig. 3.8. *Cult statue of Allat Athena,*

Palmyra Museum (photo:

author).

that it was attacked from behind.90 The nose was evidently a special concern to the

attackers who did a thorough job of removing it, leaving a large concave hole in its

place. This deliberate targeting of the nose mirrors the treatment of the British Museum Germanicus discussed in Chapter 1, and may be indicative of an attempt to negate the

embodied qualities of the image. Similarly deliberate damage is evident on the statue's right side, which has been completely cut off by a sharp instrument, leaving a very long and straight cut. Most importantly, this damage to the statue of Athena can be dated,

as the fragments were found on the floor of the temple among a very large number of

90 Gassowska 1982: 113, fig. 7 shows the fragments of the head as found.

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lamps dating to the fourth century and a number of interesting numismatic finds.91

A cache of fourth-century coins was found underneath the floor, the latest being two

coins of Valens (364-378), indicating that the temple was still active up to his reign and providing a *terminus post quem* for the attack on the cult statue. An additional coin, a loose find in the layer above the statue, had a

portrait of Aelia Flavia Flacilla Augusta, wife of Theodosius I between 376 and 386, and provides a *terminus ante quem.* Another fragment of a Classical sculpture was also found: a small head of Athena of the

Giustiniani type, this too in Pentelic marble.92 This head was found on the floor of

the temple, but no parts of its body were recovered. Yet another interesting find was a defaced altar, located *in situ* in front of the canopy for the cult statue (Fig. 3.5).93 The top part of the altar had been cut off horizontally just above its base, showing that the attackers specifically targeted objects used in worship. All of this fits a Christian attack on the pagan temple.

Not long after the discovery of the mutilated cult image of Athena in the Temple of

Allat, Barbara Gassowska used the evidence of coins and lamps to point to the agency

of Maternus Cynegius, whose anti-pagan campaigns are dated to between 385 and 388.94

This would fit well with the chronology of the coin finds from the temple, of which the last date to the reign of Theodosius. These finds also suggest that worship had continued to take place in the temple up until this time. Since the altar was uniquely placed inside the *naos*, sacrifices could have been made inside the temple and thus remained hidden from outside view, even after Theodosius had ordered all pagan worship to cease.95

Gassowska observes that Cynegius himself probably never visited Palmyra, but that his

actions further west and in Egypt could have incited local Christians to perform similar acts of destruction. As such, the case of the Temple of Allat at Palmyra presents us yet again with the methodological problem of joining archaeological evidence from a local

context with historical narratives that relate to a much wider study region. Gassowska attempts to tie very local events to the grander Mediterranean narrative of Christianization, which may or may not reflect reality on the ground; this is, however, one of

the best cases that we possess for a relatively clear correlation between the history and archaeology of Christian response.

The case of the Temple of Allat at Palmyra is furthermore significant in that it testifies once more to a mode of Christian response that was firmly guided by a specific

understanding of pagan visual practices. It was the largest cult image that received the harshest treatment (suggestive of a hierarchy of images in cult practices), and especially those parts of it that were seen to be imbued with identifiable, embodied qualities. As pointed out by Gassowska in slightly different terms, the Christian response to this

91 Gassowska 1982: 112; 118-119; Gawlikowski 1983: 90. The majority of the lamps were of a local, fourth-century type.

92 Gassowska 1982: 112; 115, fig. 9 (head as found); Gawlikowski 1983; 2008: 409.

93 Gassowska 1982: 114.

94 Gassowska 1982.

95 Trombley 1995: I, 145-146.

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colossal image of Athena entirely fits the scheme of selective destruction.96 The smaller head of Athena, perhaps of only secondary importance to the cultic practices of the

temple, was seemingly spared this treatment, although its entire body has never been

recovered. The mutilation of the temple's altar also demonstrates a concern to put an

end to a specific set of visual practices involving sacrifice. Lastly, it is interesting to note how the response in the Temple of Allat contrasted with that of the other temples of Palmyra. The temple was deserted after the Christian attack and later built over

by Byzantine and Islamic housing. It was therefore firmly secularized, whereas other

temples, such as those of Bel and Baalshamin, continued to have a sacred dimension as

they were converted into churches. To understand this change in the use of sacred space at Palmyra, one must look at the wider patterns of late antique urban development in

the city that have not been sufficiently investigated so far. Further knowledge of this development might help us in explaining why this particular sanctuary provoked such

a potent Christian response.

Liminal Places and Christian Response at Scythopolis

Scythopolis, the only member of the Decapolis on the western side of the Jordan River

in modern Israel, is among the urban sites in the Near East that provide us with the

best available stratigraphical data with which to understand the chronology of Christian responses to pagan images (Figs. 3.9-10).97 The city was the focus of major excavation projects in the 1980s under the direction of two teams, one from the Israel Antiquities Authority and the other from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The statuary

unearthed in these excavations has generally been well published and comes with good

contextual data to date its treatment and deposition. This material allows us to look more closely at the development of Christian responses to pagan sculpture within an environment of late antique urban continuity, since large parts of the city centre have been excavated, providing an invaluable snapshot of contemporary urbanism and social life.

As one of the most Hellenized urban centres of the Near East, the central district

of Scythopolis was carefully planned with colonnaded streets and included all civic

amenities, including bathhouses and a theatre, as well as monumental civic buildings

and temples. Construction on a monumental scale continued into Late Antiquity, as

the city prospered and became the capital of the new province of Palestina Secunda

in the early fifth century.98 A Christian community began to form here from at least

96 Compare Gassowska 1982: 117 and Chapter 1, “Interpreting Response: Selective Destruction as a Framework.” Gassowska also makes comparisons with the practices of *damnatio memoriae* (1982: 115).

97 See Foerster & Tsafrir 1992; Tsafrir & Foerster 1997; Tsafrir 2003 for overviews of the excavations of the city centre of Nysa-Scythopolis (Bet Shean). Earlier work at Scythopolis by the University of Pennsylvania Museum focused on the *tell* and the cemeteries, cf. Rowe 1930; FitzGerald 1931.

For an overview of sculpture from the site, see Fischer 1998: 160-162. For recent finds on the *tell*, see Mazar 2006.

98 See Tsafrir & Foerster 1997; Tsafrir 2003 on late antique urban development at Scythopolis.

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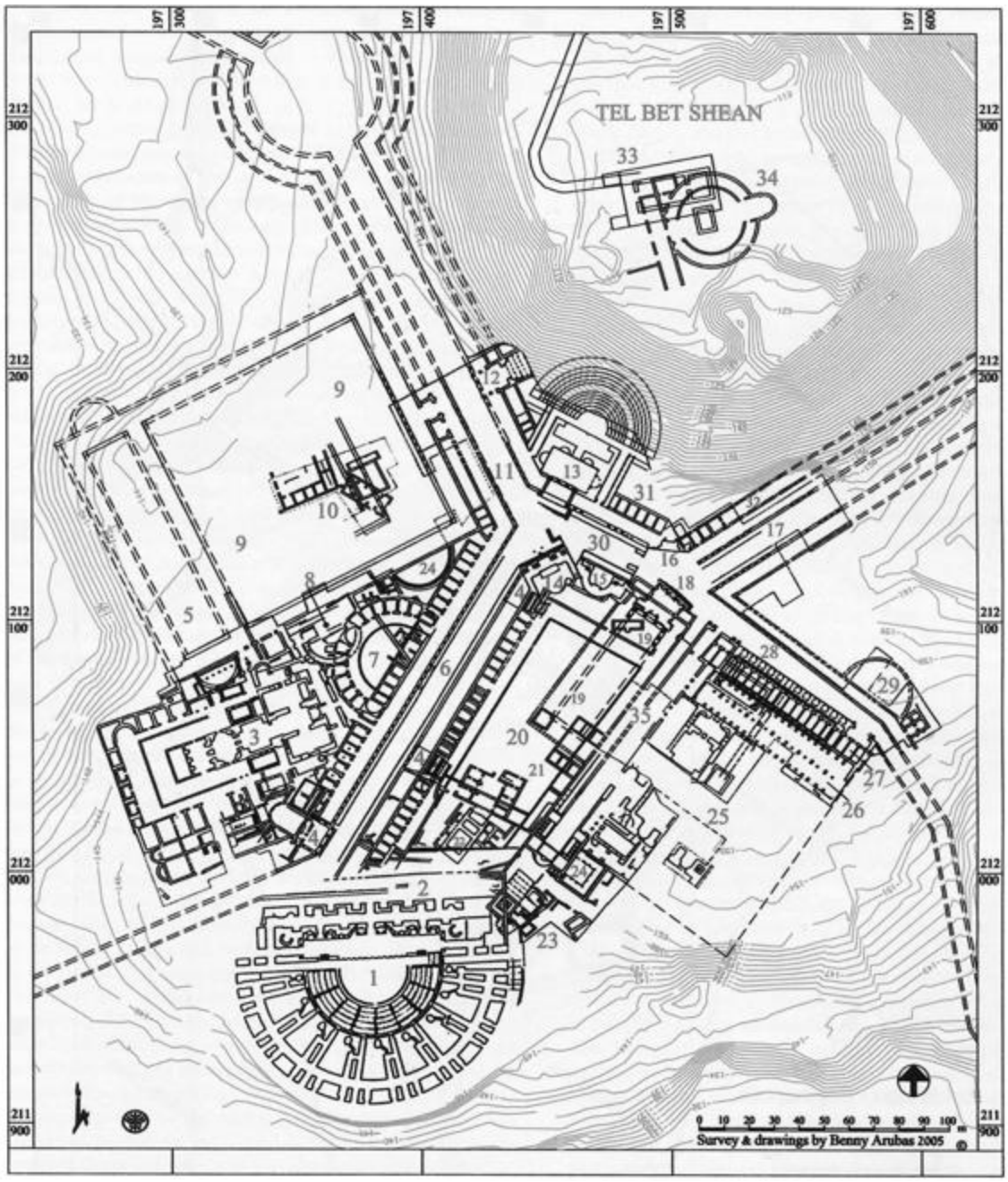

Map of central Scythopolis, 1: Theatre, 3: Western Bathhouse, 7: Sigma *, 8: Odeon, 17: Valley Street,* **Fig. 3.9.**

19: Basilica, 25: Eastern Bathhouse, 28: Silvanus Street, 34: Round Church (courtesy of the Hebrew University Excavations at Bet Shean).

the third century onwards. In the fourth century this community was affiliated with

Arianism, but there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case later.99 According to Ammianus Marcellinus, the city experienced religious tensions in the late fourth century when Julian persecuted Christians.100 In 636, Scythopolis was conquered by Arab forces, 99 See Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, 30.5.5 on Scythopolis' Arian population in the fourth century.

100 Amm. Marc. 19.12.8.

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Fig. 3.10. *View from the tell of the city centre of Scythopolis (photo: author).*

but life seemingly went on with relatively few changes until a major earthquake in 749

destroyed many parts of the urban fabric.

As has been ascertained at many other late antique sites across the Mediterranean,

Christianity only slowly imposed itself on some of Scythopolis' previously pagan sites of worship.101 Notably, a large round church replaced an earlier pagan temple, probably dedicated to Zeus Akraios and dating to the Hellenistic or Roman period, on the

impressive *tell* that rises above the city.102 The excavations undertaken on the *tell* by the University of Pennsylvania Museum in the 1920s recovered only a very small number of

sculptural fragments, but some of these were found in intriguing, secondary contexts.103

Seven fragments of a colossal statue, mostly belonging to fingers and toes, were found 101 Tsafrir 1998; Bar 2008: 281-283.

102 On the Temple of Zeus Akraios, see Tsafrir 1989.

103 On the late antique/Byzantine levels on the *tell*, see Rowe 1930: 43-45; FitzGerald 1931; Mazar 2006: 40-42.

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and have recently been republished.104 They were discovered in two different locations at some distance from each other, although the majority

were found in a reservoir south of the temple.105 The identity of the statue has not been established with any degree

of certainty; it could be a god or an emperor. Although there are no joins between the fragments, Gerald FitzGerald suggested that they were all part of the same statue that may originally have stood in or near the temple that was later to be replaced by the

round church. If placed in such a prominent position, the colossal statue could easily have been perceived as a cult image by the Christians, and it may subsequently have

been targeted by Christian iconoclasts. The deposition of the fragments in cisterns and reservoirs would fit with a number of other instances in which pagan statuary was deposited in such contexts, sometimes with very little apparent physical damage and, as

in this case, with a high degree of fragmentation. It is unfortunate that the chronology and context of the deposition of these fragments is so poorly understood, as it would

have been interesting to know how the statue was treated after the conversion of the

temple.

More recent excavations have focused on the major public buildings that made up

the Hellenistic, Roman, and late antique city centre, located at the foot of the *tell*.

Work in the so-called civic basilica that faced two of the city's main colonnaded streets, dubbed Valley Street and Sylvanus Street by the excavators, unearthed an altar dedicated to Dionysus.106 The altar, with a dedicatory inscription dating to 141-142, was found

in its original position in the basilica. The basilica was destroyed during an earthquake in 363, after which the derelict building appears to have been deliberately left as a ruin for some time, before being built over by the construction of the Byzantine Agora.107

However, before the earthquake, the top part of the altar that made up the offering

table had been removed, which is demonstrative of what Yoram Tsafrir has described

as an ambivalent attitude towards the pagan past; it is very similar to the treatment of the altar in the Temple of Allat at Palmyra.108 The altar was connected to the city's own history through its legendary founder, Dionysus, but its potential for worship had to be compromised when Christianity emerged as the city's hegemonic religion. The precise

function of the basilica is unfortunately unclear, but it was certainly a public space that could have combined economic, municipal, and judicial purposes. The presence of an

104 FitzGerald 1931: pl. 25.1 depicts the fragments, now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum (see Romano 2006: 191-193).

105 FitzGerald 1931: 33; 44; Romano 2006: 192-193. On the architecture of the Round Church, see FitzGerald 1931: 18-26.

106 Foerster & Tsafrir 1988: 31; 1992: 122; Di Segni, Foerster, & Tsafrir 1999: 64-75; Tsafrir 2008: 119-120. The dedication inscription on the altar (dated to A.D. 12) was still intact: "With good fortune, Seleucos, son of Ariston, [dedicated] as a thanks to the god, the lord Dionysos, the founder, in the year 75" (quoted from Foerster & Tsafrir 1988: 31). On the importance of this altar to the foundation myth of Scythopolis, see Belayche 2009: 174-179. On the basilica, see also Tsafrir & Foerster 1997: 96.

107 Di Segni, Foerster, & Tsafrir 1999: 63-64.

108 Tsafrir 2008: 120.

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Fig. 3.11. *Statue of Venus as found in the hypocaust of the Eastern Bathhouse, Scythopolis (after Tsafrir 2003: Taf. 111a).*

object directly related to pagan ritual within such a space could well have presented the authorities with a precarious situation. Perhaps their response was caused by a similar debate to that which took place later in Rome concerning the fate of the Altar of Victory? In the case of Scythopolis, the altar remained in place, but its value as an object of worship was greatly diminished. This is a reminder that it was not statuary

alone that offended Christian viewers, but more specifically the sculpture that was directly part of worship.

The most important sculptural assemblage from late antique Scythopolis comprises

13 life-size statues that were discovered in the Eastern Bathhouse (Fig. 3.9), immediately east of the civic basilica and excavated by the Israel Antiquities Authority.109 It includes several mutilated statues and is of great importance to the present study. The area of the bathhouse was later built over by the so-called Silvanus Hall whose construction is dated by a dedicatory inscription in Greek to 515-516, providing a useful *terminus ante quem* for the mutilation and deposition of the statues.110 Among the sculptures was a headless statue of the Capitoline Venus type that had been dumped in the hypocaust

109 On the architecture of the Eastern Bathhouse, refer to Mazor 1999: 299-301.

110 Tsafrir & Foerster 1997: 129-131; Tsafrir 2003: 283; 2008: 134. On the IAA excavations of the Eastern Bathhouse, see Mazor & Bar-Nathan 1998: 11-14.

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Statue of Dionysus from

Fig. 3.12.

Scythopolis, Rockefeller

Museum, East Jerusalem

(photo: author).

of the *caldarium* (Fig. 3.11).111 The head was not recovered and it is likely that the statue had been beheaded before its final disposal, the head then having been deposited elsewhere. This is similar to the treatment of the nude statue of Venus at Gaza mentioned

in the *Life of Porphyry*.112 An episode recounted by Quodvultdeus, bishop of Carthage, furthermore reports an exorcism of a girl in 434 who had been possessed by a demon

after having seen a (presumably nude) statue of Venus in a bathhouse, which is sugges-

111 Foerster 2005; Tsafrir 1998; 2008: 135-137. It was found in the hypocaust alongside a nymph and is now on view at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

112 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 59-61.

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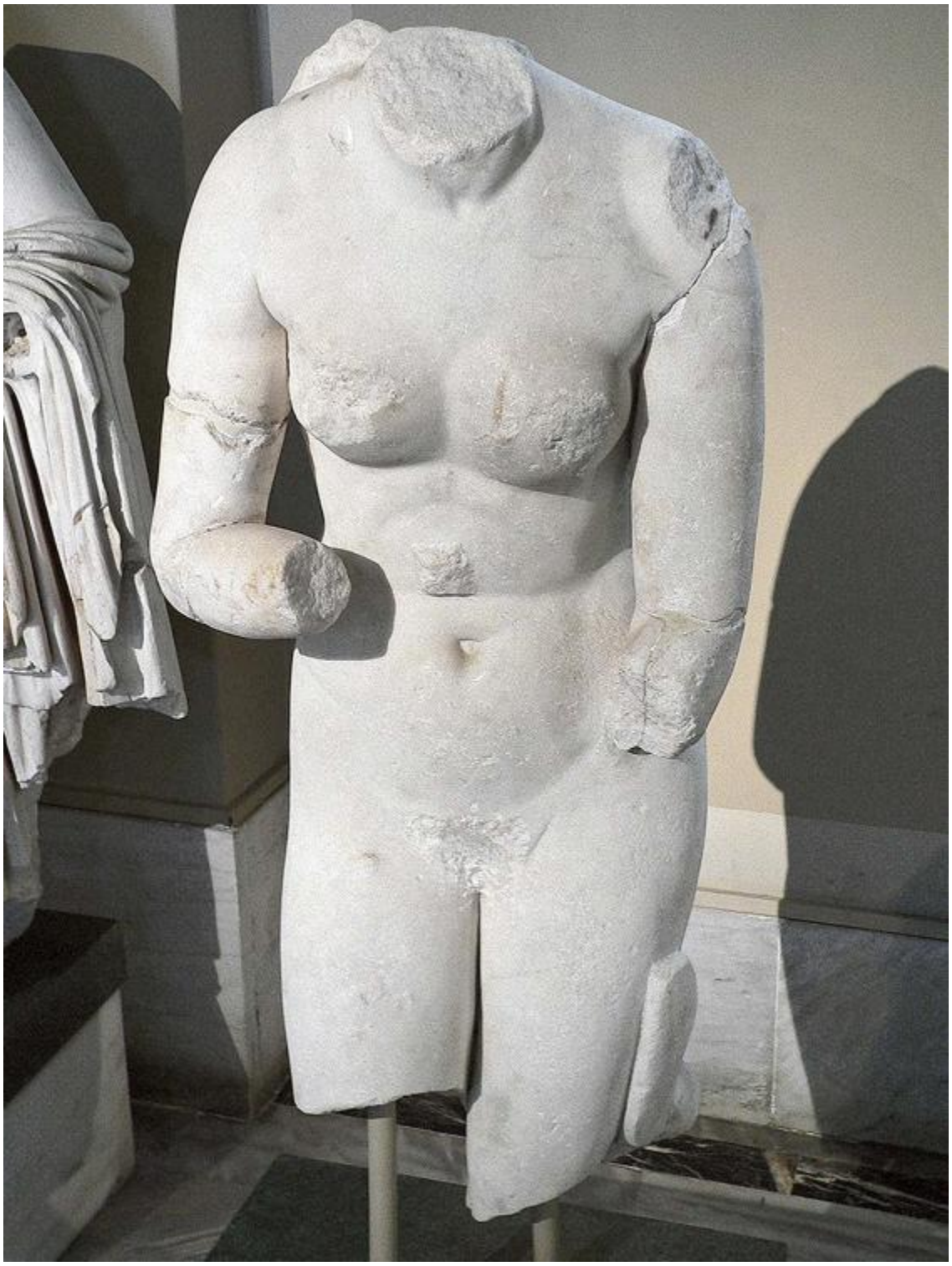

Fig. 3.13. *Mutilated statue of Venus from*

Miletus, Istanbul Archaeological

Museum (photo: author, used

by permission of the museum).

tive of how such a statue could have been perceived by some Christian viewers.113 It is also worth remembering Theodoret's more general condemnation of Venus' nudity as

"more shameless than that of any prostitute standing in front of a brothel."114 Albeit anecdotal, these small bits of evidence point to a Christian response that was rooted in an objection to the nudity of the statue in question and the potentially dangerous, demonic powers that it posed to its viewers, not least within the environment of the baths.

In the same hypocaust in which the Venus was recovered, another headless statue, a

semi-nude nymph that had been used as a fountain decoration, was also deposited.115 The rest of the sculptural assemblage found in the Eastern Bathhouse has been interpreted

by the excavators as the victim of Christian destruction that occurred when the baths

were abandoned in the sixth century. However, some of the sculptural finds, including

a colossal torso of an imperial statue embedded in a wall in the western part of the

Silvanus Hall and a statue of Athena with the *aegis*, appear to have been employed as 113 See Chapter 1, "Why Did Christians Destroy Pagan Sculpture?"

114 πάσης μὲν ἑταίρας ἐπὶ τέγους ἑστώσης ἀναιδέστερον Ἀφροδίτης τὸ σχῆμα (Theodoret, *Ellenikon Therapeutike Pathematon*, 3.79, translation quoted from Gazda 1981: 167).

115 Foerster 2008: 136; fig. 13.

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little more than reusable *spolia* blocks, and one should be hesitant about interpreting this response as a form of Christian destruction.116 Another sculpture, a nude statue of Dionysus, is more likely to have been attacked by Christians (Fig. 3.12).117 It was found in the bathhouse's eastern portico, which faces Silvanus Street. The treatment of the

facial features of this statue is in agreement with the framework of selective destruction as eyes, nose, and mouth have all been mutilated. Additionally, its genitalia have been chipped off. This response is again revealing in light of Theodoret's description of Dionysus as "that limb-loosener and effeminate creature,"118 and it is not difficult to understand his dislike given the god's continued popularity in Late Antiquity in everything from Egyptian textiles to Nonnos' elaborate poem, the *Dionysiaca*.119 This kind of mockery of the feminine aspects of pagan representations is a general characteristic of much Christian polemic.120

Statuary found in late antique contexts from around the Mediterranean presents

material that is comparable to the response that can be observed in the Eastern Bath-

house at Scythopolis. There are further examples of 'castrated' statues, where genitalia have been deliberately removed, from baths at Salamis, Perge, Miletus, and Sardis (Figs.

1.18, 3.13).121 Similar treatment can be identified on other statues that have less certain 116 The find of the imperial statue was first reported in Foerster & Tsafrir 1988: 33. See also Foerster

& Tsafrir 1992: 123; fig. 13; Fischer 1998: 160-161, cat. no. 188; Foerster 2008: 134-135, figs. 9-10.

The removal of head, arms, and legs may simply have been a case of making the sculpture into a conveniently-sized building stone. On *spolia*, see my remarks on the reuse of sculpture in the Temple of Allat at Palmyra above, “The Life and Afterlife of a Goddess at Palmyra.” On the Athena, see Tsafrir & Foerster 1997: 129.

117 Foerster & Tsafrir 1990; 1992: 122-123: fig. 12; 1993: 25-26; Tsafrir & Foerster 1997: 129; Fischer 1998: 161, cat. no. 190; Foerster 2000 (noting the intentional removal of the genitalia and the targeted mutilation of eyes, nose, mouth, and chin on p. 136); Tsafrir 2003: 283; 2008: 132-133, fig. 8. The statue is shown as found in Foerster & Tsafrir 1990: 53. The find spot is marked on fig. 41

in Foerster & Tsafrir 1993: 26. On the find spot, Foerster comments: “It is not clear whether the statue was placed there to preserve it or was discarded there at the beginning of the 6th century”

(2000: 135).

118 ὁ Διόνυσος λυσιμελής τις καὶ γύννις ὑπὸ τούτων κατασκευάζεται (Theodoret, *Ellenikon Therapeutike Pathematon*, 3.80, translation quoted here from Gazda 1981: 167).

119 For Dionysus on late antique textiles, see Lenzen 1960. See Bowersock 1990 for the popularity of Dionysus in Late Antiquity more generally.

120 See also Nasrallah 2010: 216 on the examples of Clement of Alexandria and Tatian.

121 For a general overview, see Hannestad 2001. For other cases of ‘castration’, see Vorster 1998: 291; Auinger & Rathmayr 2007: 247-250; 254-255, n. 153. On the Baths of Faustina at Miletus and their sculptures, including a ‘castrated’ Venus and Dionysus-Satyr Group, see Gerkan & Krischen 1928: 50-125; Sch neider 2009. On a headless and fragmentary

torso of Apollo or Bacchus from the Bath-Gymnasium Complex at Sardis, the effects of a pointed blow are visible over the pubic area, see Hanfmann & Ramage 1978: 109-110 (no. 120), figs. 247-248. On the gymnasium at Salamis, see Karageorghis & Vermeule 1964: 11-12, cat. no. 3; 18-19, cat. no. 8; 22-23, cat. no. 22; Hannestad 2001: 72-73; Fejfer 2006: 92-94. Other sculptures whose contexts are less well known have also been subjected to castration and mutilation. For a Hermaphrodite from Cyrenaica whose genitalia have been removed, see Huskinson 1975: pl. 18, no. 42. A Ganymede from Ephesus has Re-Imagining Idols

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Fig. 3.14. *Mutilated statue of river god, Side Museum (photo: author).*

archaeological contexts, for example, a river god from Side (Fig. 3.14) and a torso of a naked youth found in 1984 in a public building north of the East Baths at Gerasa, just across the Jordan River from Scythopolis (Fig. 3.15).122 In the cases of Salamis and Perge, it has been suggested that the castrations may have been contemporary with restoration work that was carried out in Late Antiquity. Thus, at Salamis, the excavators connect

the castrations with a fifth-century phase of construction and suggest that pagan statues were acceptable as artworks but that the nudity had to be repressed by a new regime of Christian decency.123 At Antioch in the mid-sixth century, a church was constructed

on top of the bathhouse and a statue of Hygieia from its sculptural programme was

reused, whilst a statue of Asklepios was discarded and smashed.124

These Christian responses situated within the context of bathhouses point to the

also been ‘castrated’, but was found reused in a late antique context, see Aurenhammer 1990: 120-122, cat. no. 101. A torso of Dionysus from Ephesus, reused in a late antique context and now in London, also appears to have been ‘castrasted’, see ibid.: 63-64, cat. no. 42.

122 Friedland 2001: 466ff, Abb 6-8; Weber 2002: 488, cat. no. C 7; Taf. 127; commenting that “[d]as Genital wurde schon in alter Zeit abgeschlagen, was die durchgängige, aber sehr düh ne gelbliche Patine beweist” (488).

123 Karageorghis & Vermeule 1964: 4.

124 Becker & Kondoleon 2005: 247-250.

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Torso of naked youth from

Fig. 3.15.

Gerasa (photo: author).

liminal status of these quintessentially Roman buildings.125 Progression through bath-

houses was, for example, strictly ordered by means of an architectural scheme.126 Baths were furthermore a place where different social groups (including both sexes) were

able to mix, offering a dangerous location for lewd behaviour to take place; they were criticized by Christian authors such as Clement of Alexandria and Jerome. The liminal

status of baths was not an innovation of the Christian age, however. For Jews, the display of mythological sculpture in the Greco-Roman baths had also posed problems.127

This is famously seen in a story from the Mish nah when a Greek confronts a rabbi over his bathing habits. How could he bathe surrounded by pagan sculpture, specifically a

125 On Roman bathing culture, see most recently Yegül 2010 (pp. 27-34 on nudity in baths). Turner

& Turner define liminality as “a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo, which has few of the attributes of sociocultural life that precedes and follows it” (1982: 202). On late antique Christian attitudes to nudity and clothing, see also Métraux 2008; Yegül 2010: 201-206.

126 Fagan 1999: 206-219.

127 Sperber 1996; 1998: 58-72; Eliav 2000; Stirling 2005: 157.

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statue of Venus? The rabbi replied that “I never came into her domain. She came into mine. They don’t say, ‘Let’s make a bathhouse as an ornament for Aphrodite.’ But they

say, ‘Let’s make Aphrodite as an ornament for the bathhouse’.”128 Even so, in another

episode from the Mish nah, a rabbi instructed that the statues in a bathhouse in Tiberias should be destroyed.129

The liminal status of baths and the statuary displayed there is also demonstrated by

sculptural finds from outside the area of Jewish influence in the Near East. At least two further finds of sculpture in fourth- and fifth-century contexts in bathhouses, at Astigi in Spain and Grumentum in southern Italy respectively, show a similar phenomenon

taking place in the Western Mediterranean.130 In the case of Astigi, an Amazon had

been broken into several pieces and then deposited along with several other statues in the *natatio* of the baths.131

The fact that several of these mutilated statues were nude is important here, and it

ties in with contemporary Christian discussions of proper sexual conduct and bodily

decency. In Christian apologetical writings, for example, the pagan gods were frequently attacked as being sexually immoral.132 The fifth-century Gallic aristocrat and bishop

Sidonius Apollinaris was later perfectly willing both to build a bath on his estate and to decorate it with wall-paintings, but also expressed in one of his letters that “[h]ere no disgraceful tale is exposed by the nude beauty of painted figures, for though such a tale may be a glory to art it dishonours the artists.”133

New Christian attitudes towards the body thus further problematized the liminal

status of baths and necessitated modifications of the sculptural decoration, as seen, for example, at Salamis and also at Scythopolis. As such, bathhouses then remained one of

the urban spaces where pagan statuary could continue to be on display, at least into the fifth century. Indeed, bathing culture thrived in late antique Scythopolis. Numerous

mosaic inscriptions from the Western Bathhouse on Palladius Street thus attest to the

benefactions to this establishment of the local political elite well into the sixth century 128 Quoted from Stirling 2005: 157.

129 *Abodah Zarah* 4.43d; see also Blidstein 1974; Weiss 2008: 563.

130 On Grumentum, see Thaler & Watson 2003. Excavations of the bathhouse here recovered a group of mutilated statuary, the deposition of which has been dated by the excavators to between 380

and 420. On Écija, see Romo Salas 2001; 2003: 293-294.

131 Romo Salas 2003: 293. The special treatment of the Amazon may suggest that it was handled by pagans sympathetic to the motif, but it could also simply be coincidental as the other pieces of sculpture from the same context are much more fragmentary. In terms of dating, Romo Sales suggests that the deposition of the sculpture dates to the early fourth century, based on a 50 %

sample of the pottery finds (2001: 164). This could connect the deposition with the reign of Constantine, but scholarship has nuanced earlier narratives of his ‘anti-pagan’ policies, see Chapter 1,

“Breaking the Gods: Christian Perspectives.”

132 Finney 1994: 56-58.

133 “non hic per nudam pictorum corporum pulchritudinem turpis prostat historia, quae sicut ornat artem, sic devenustat artificem” (Sid. Apoll. *Epist.* 2.2.6, trans. Anderson).

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(Fig. 3.9).134 However, in comparison to the Eastern Bathhouse, these baths, originally built in the late fourth/early fifth century, are notable for being an almost completely sculpture-free environment. This may explain why these baths continued to be in use

long after the Eastern Bathhouse had been built over. The status of baths as liminal

spaces and potential places of transgression made the display of statuary troublesome

and problematic, especially in the case of nude statuary, causing responses such as those observed in the Eastern Bathhouse at Scythopolis and comparable sites in both the

Eastern and Western Mediterranean.

Other sculptures from Scythopolis, including several excavated in the theatre (Fig. 3.9), have been interpreted by their excavators as victims of

intentional mutilation. These

include a Hermes that had stood in the *scaenae frons* of the theatre that was broken and deposited in a pit outside.135 Another find was a headless Tyche, recovered from the

near vicinity of the theatre.136 It may not be coincidental that mutilated statuary was found in or originated from buildings such as the theatre and the odeon. The spectacles that took place at theatres were frequently scorned by Christian writers, such as Joh n Chrysostom, Tertullian, and Cyprian, as belonging to the demonic realm.137 Jacob of

Sarug also angrily attacked those who claimed to be Christian but attended theatrical

performances.138 As Karel Vriezen has shown, in a number of cases in the Near East

churches were constructed at the sites of theatres and odeons, in all likelihood as efforts to counter their earlier significance.139 At Pella, for instance, a church was built around 400 immediately beside the odeon. The odeon at Scythopolis was destroyed by the

construction of the Sigma in 506/507 (Fig. 3.9), thus removing the physical framework

for the performance of such public spectacles.140 The chronology of the responses to

the images there thus fits with the evidence from the Eastern Bathhouse.

A number of other sculptural finds from both the urban centre and near vicinity of

Scythopolis are indicative of the dwindling importance of statuary in terms of the em-

bellishment of urban and sacred spaces. Both pragmatic and more dismissive responses

can be identified among this material. Excavations by the Hebrew University expedition of a shop on the Valley Street that received a new mosaic pavement in the late fourth

134 Foerster & Tsafrir 1988: 10-18.

135 See Applebaum 1978 on the theatre, including a fragmentary and "dismembered marble statue –

apparently of Ptolemy III" (ibid.: 85, n. 11; 96-97; 105, fig. K). On the Hermes, see Foerster & Tsafrir 1992: 122; fig. 14; Tsafrir & Foerster 1997: 129; Fischer 1998: 160, cat. no. 187; Tsafrir 2008: 136.

136 Foerster & Tsafrir 1988: 21; 1992: 123; fig. 15; Tsafrir & Foerster 1997: 129; Fischer 1998: 189, cat.

no. 189.

137 Vriezen 1995: 78; Leyerle 2001: 13-41 (on late antique theatre), 42-74 (on Joh n Chrysostom's views); Webb 2008. Theatrical performances were explicitly forbidden on Sundays, according to the *CTh* 2.8.23-24; 15.2.5.

138 On Jacob of Sarug's homilies on theatrical performance and other spectacles, see Moss 1935.

139 Vriezen 1995: 79. On the Pella odeon and the Civic Complex, see McNicoll, Smith, & Hennessy 1982: 78-82; 103-110; McNicoll et al. 1992: 147-152.

140 On the Odeon, see Tsafrir & Foerster 1997: 99; 120; Mazor & Najjar 2007.

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Fig. 3.16. *Head of Athena from Tel Naharon, dated to the second century, Israel Museum,*

Jerusalem, inv. IAA 78.505

(courtesy of the Israel

Museum).

or early fifth century unearthed a number of bronze items had been collected for the

purposes of recasting. This included several fragments of an over-life-size male nude

statue, including both its hands.141 Additionally, in Silvanus Street, a fragment of a statue of Hercules was found.142

Two further finds of sculpture from the near vicinity of Scythopolis are interesting

for what they reveal about more destructive late antique Christian responses. Two heads of Athena and Venus were found incidentally by a tractor driver on Tel Naharon, but

rescue excavations were able to date their deposition to the fifth century based on the ceramic finds (Fig. 3.16).143 Fanny Vitto has suggested that the two heads come from

statues that were decapitated as part of a purification ritual, and as such, an example of the sort of performance iconoclasm that I have discussed previously.144 This would

explain their place of deposition in a refuse pit on the slope of Tel Naharon. Vitto also 141 Foerster & Tsafrir 1993: 22; fig. 36. Other bronze items in this cache, found in a shop right next to the Antonius monument, included ornaments for a monumental door and a brazier.

142 Foerster & Tsafrir 1993: 31, fig. 31.

143 On this find and its archaeological context, see Vitto 1991; Fischer 1998: 161, cat. no. 191 (Athena); 161-162, cat. no. 162 (Venus); Friedland

2008: 343, cat. no. 3 (Athena).

144 Vitto 1991: 41.

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Chapter 3

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notes that the removal of the sculptures' noses may have been part of this ritual, but it is noteworthy that this is the only major damage inflicted on them.145 Nonetheless, this find may provide some insight into why so many heads are missing from the sculptural

finds from the city centre of Scythopolis.

As in many other parts of the Mediterranean, the process of Christianization at

Scythopolis was complex and a variety of responses can be identified from archaeology

as well as epigraphy. The city's Tyche was depicted in a mosaic medallion on the floor of the so-called Sigma, dated to the early sixth century, and there is evidence to suggest that Classical literature and culture still flourished among Scythopolis' inhabitants at this date.146 Similarly, in the monastery located just inside the city walls at the northern outskirts of Scythopolis and named by the excavators the "Monastery of the Lady Mary,"

mosaic floors dated by inscriptions to *c*. 567 depict representations of both people and animals.147 The find of a statue base of Eudoxia (400-404), the same empress who had

been involved in the destruction of the Marneion at Gaza, furthermore demonstrates

that the statue habit also continued at least into the fifth century in the city's public spaces.148 Two-dimensional representation and *ekphrasis* were thus perfectly acceptable art forms, whereas three-dimensional representation of pagan divinities posed more

urgent questions to both authorities and ordinary Christian viewers.

The implications of the fate of a number of pagan statues at Scythopolis from baths

and other public spaces is that those images that suffered the harshest treatment were part of a contested environment, the liminal spaces of the baths and sites of theatrical performance, which made them especially susceptible to a violent Christian response.

It was primarily under these very specific circumstances of display that destructive responses can be observed. The Christian response to pagan statues in Scythopolis was thus determined by their physical context of display, more than a simple polarity between

a Christian present and a pagan past. Whereas statues and objects with obvious cultic

functions (such as those uncovered on the *tell* and the altar in the basilica) are likely to have already been removed or mutilated in the late fourth century, like the cult statue of Athena at Palmyra, the more secularized spaces in which pagan statues were also

found at Scythopolis allowed them to remain on view, at least during the first round of Christian response. This response is thus characterized by a chronological development in attitudes towards pagan images, as they continued to be displayed in certain contexts into the sixth century. The Christian responses to pagan sculpture in late antique bath-145 Vitto 1991: 42-43; and see Chapter 1, "Interpreting Response: Selective Destruction as a Framework."

146 Tsafrir 2008: 138-139.

147 On this monastery and its mosaic floors, see FitzGerald 1939. The last coins from the monastery date to the reign of Heraclius I (610-641). In the Months Mosaic in Hall A, most of January above the head has been patched up with plain white tesserae, but it appears to be a case of repair work (ibid.: pl. VII, fig. 1).

148 The inscription tells us that the portrait in question was a gilded bronze statue, see Tsafrir 2008: 125-127.

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houses at Scythopolis and elsewhere thus represent an ongoing negotiation of liminal public spaces as influenced by changing religious identities and changing patterns of

visual practices.

The contribution of Scythopolis to the wider study of Christian response is thus two-

fold. Firstly, distinctive chronological phases of Christian response can be identified.

These phases are demonstrative of a complex ambiguity in Christian relationships with

pagan statuary. The second key outcome is the lesson that when looking at sculpture

in late antique contexts, it is necessary to move beyond single finds and to incorporate larger-scale assemblages as well as other forms of contextualizing material, such as that which can be found at Scythopolis. Ultimately, this will lead to a more nuanced and

more complete picture of how Christians appropriated and transformed the sculptural

environment of the late antique city.

Displaying Pagan Statues in the Contested Cityscapes of

the Near East: Caesarea Maritima and Beyond

This section situates the issues of memory and materiality in the late antique cityscape that I have discussed elsewhere at more length within the regional context of the Near East.149 It investigates the contested public spaces in which pagan statues were displayed in Late Antiquity, where they constituted a link between the Christian present and the pagan past, and provoked a variety of occasionally contradictory responses. Through

discussion of case studies in two Near Eastern urban centres, Caesarea Maritima and

Caesarea Philippi, this section looks at the different meanings that the display of pagan statuary could have had in such late antique contexts. I will argue that closer consideration of such 'memoryscapes' allows us to speculate on contemporary conceptions

of aesthetics, memory, and meaning as well as the impact of Christianization on these

issues. The two case studies will emphasize that closer attention to the materiality of statues, that is their physical state and appearance, is crucial for understanding the nature of Christian response. It will furthermore demonstrate how Christian viewers

could re-imagine the pagan statuary that they encountered in their daily lives.

Displaying Pagan Statues in Caesarea Maritima

Caesarea Maritima was founded by Herod the Great and became one of the most impor-

tant urban centres in the Near East, not least because of its strategically located harbour and status as a *colonia*, which it acquired during the reign of Vespasian (Fig. 3.17).150

The city's importance peaked in the late fourth century.151 It was an important early

Christian centre, home for shorter or longer periods to, amongst others, Paul, Origen, 149 Kristensen 2010b.

150 For an overview of Caesarea Maritima's urban development and its investigation, see Levine 1975a; Holum et al. 1988. On its pantheon, see Hopfe 1990b.

151 On urban continuity in late antique Caesarea Maritima, refer to Holum 1992b; 1998; 2003a; 2005; Patrich 2001.

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Map of late antique Caesarea Maritima (by Anna Iamim, courtesy of the Combined Caesarea **Fig. 3.17.**

Expeditions).

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and Eusebius, and became the seat of a metropolitan see.152 However, during the fifth century, the city gradually lost its ecclesiastical significance to the Patriarch of Jerusalem. The important harbour deteriorated at the same time, resulting in an economic

downturn. While the city was still a lively urban and important administrative centre in Late Antiquity, it decreased in importance after the Arab conquest in the mid-seventh

century.153

As in many urban centres in the eastern Mediterranean, the religious transformation

from paganism to Christianity was slow in Caesarea Maritima. The transformation is

reflected in the configuration of urban space, where a profoundly Christian topography only slowly appeared. An octagonal Christian church was constructed between 525 and

550 on top of the platform of the most conspicious building in the city, the Temple of Roma and Augustus, located on the waterfront.154 This platform had previously held

two famous colossal statues of Roma and Caesar that are mentioned by Josephus.155 The

cultic activities in the temple itself had probably stopped in the early fifth century, after which the entire building was quarried for *spolia*. When the Christian church was constructed on the temple platform, it incorporated

spoliated building blocks from earlier buildings. The meaning of the church's location at the site of the city's most important pagan sanctuary would have been clear enough, signifying Christianity's triumph over

the most prominent of Caesarea Maritima's urban sanctuaries. This triumph should be

seen in the light of the occasionally turbulent process of Christianization that I have considered in a number of other Near Eastern contexts in this chapter. During the

fourth and fifth centuries, Caesarea Maritima may have experienced episodes of religious violence similar to those that can be observed in cities such as Gaza and Alexandria,

even if Procopius gives the impression that the city's inhabitants were quite pragmatic in such affairs.156 It is within this framework of urban and religious transformation that the late antique display of pagan statuary must be interpreted.

The sculptural finds from Caesarea Maritima have recently been summarized in an

article by Rivka Gersht, who concludes that the majority of finds come from secondary

or disturbed contexts.157 However, many of these contexts reveal changing attitudes

towards urban space, aesthetics, and the past. Furthermore, some point to the period's other pressing needs, such as the city's increasingly insecure position in the changing political climate. Four headless statues were, for example, used to block the city gates at some point before the Muslim forces invaded.158 Such reuse out of necessity has also been observed in the mid-fourth century at Aphrodisias, where a variety of funerary

152 On the Christian Church in Caesarea Maritima, see Downey 1975; Krentz 1992.

153 On sixth-century Byzantine administration in Caesarea Maritima, see Holum 1995.

154 Holum 1999: 27; 2003a: 161-163. Only one other temple, a mithraeum, has been archaeologically explored in Caesarea. This was in use into the early fourth century, cf. Levine 1975a: 22.

155 Joseph, *BJ* 1.413.

156 Procop., *Secret History*, 11.26

157 Gersht 2008.

158 See Gersht 1987: cat. nos. 10, 19, 26; Peleg & Reich 1992.

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monuments and statues were used in the construction of a new city wall; this reuse appears to have been entirely pragmatic in character, as we also saw in the case of the Temple of Allat at Palmyra.159 Fragments of heavily battered statuary have been discovered elsewhere in late antique contexts at Caesarea, but it is altogether more difficult to interpret their fate.160

One of the most interesting aspects of the afterlife of sculpture at Caesarea is the

evidence for the continued display of pagan statues in new contexts.161 Two episodes

from the city's urban history are particularly useful in considering how the process of Christianization came to influence the display of pagan statues in the urban landscape.

The first of these relates to a small project of urban restoration that was carried out in the second half of the sixth century, a time when Caesarea had at least officially become a fully Christianized city.162 The restoration project took place in a thoroughfare in the heart of the city and immediately east of the harbour, an area that excavators in 1951 coined the Byzantine Esplanade.163 It was commemorated by its sponsor, Flavios

Strategios, in a mosaic inscription that also mentions a proconsul named Flavios Ento-

lios.164 Although these two individuals are known purely from this one particular text, the inscription is datable to between 546 and 606 as it refers to a tenth indiction that must be a year within this sequence. As such, it gives a good indication of the general date of the restoration project as well as important information about the magistrates responsible for such an undertaking.

The decorative part of this project included the installation of two reused statues,

both of colossal size (Figs. 3.18-19).165 For this reason, the esplanade is also occasionally known as the “Street of Statues”.166 The fact that parts of the two statues were built into the architectural features of the Byzantine Esplanade strongly suggests that the

re-display of the statues was contemporary with its construction.167 The best known

159 As discussed above, “The Life and Afterlife of a Goddess at Palmyra.”

160 For example a battered female marble head of a statue, found in a shop on the west side of Cardo W1 that opened up towards Decumanus S2, in Area KK, Stratum VI (dated by the excavators to the “Byzantine Period”), see Patrich 1998: 51-52, fig. 19.

161 See Gersht 2008: 509-510.

162 Downey 1975; Levine 1975a: 135-140; Holum et al. 1988: 155-200; Holum 2003a; 2008.

163 Yeivin 1955; Gersht 1999: 391; Lehmann & Holum 2000: 16; Holum 2005: 105-106; 2008: 542-551; Tsafrir 2008: 132.

164 Lehmann & Holum 2000: no. 59, 82-84. The inscription reads in full: “Under Flavios Entolios, of gloriosissimate grade, general and proconsul, Flavios Strategios, of spectabilate grade, father and first man, (built) the arch together with the wall and the staircase from city funds, in the tenth indiction, with good fortune.” The tenth indiction can refer to 546, 561, 576, 591, or 606.

165 Avi-Yonah 1970; Diplock 1971; 1973; Kreikenbom 1992: 250, cat. no. V 29; taf. 31; Fischer 1998: 145, cat. no. 129. M. Avi-Yonah suggested in his publication of the porphyry statue that it originated from the local “Hadrianeum,” known from an inscription (1970, and see Levine 1975b: 22; Fischer 1996).

166 Fischer 1996: 256.

167 Holum 2008: 548.

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Fig. 3.18. *The ‘Byzantine Esplanade’, Caesarea Maritima (photo: author).*

Fig. 3.19. *Reconstruction drawing of the 'Byzantine Esplanade', Caesarea Maritima (courtesy of Anna Iamim and Kenneth Holum / Combined Caesarea Expeditions).*

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Porphyry statue in the

Fig. 3.20.

‘Byzantine Esplanade’, Caesarea

Maritima (photo: author).

of the two is a red porphyry statue, approximately 3 m tall and dated to the second

or third century (Fig. 3.20).168 This headless statue was placed on a granite throne that did not originally belong to it. The excavator furthermore noted how the statue had

been in a mutilated state when it was placed in this setting and that its lower part was supported by piece of marble.169 The statue’s missing head is presumed to have been a

portrait of the emperor Hadrian, and it has been suggested that it originally served as the cult image in a local Temple of Hadrian that is known from other sources.170 The

other statue, also headless, was made from marble and portrays an unidentified god

(Jupiter?), an emperor represented in the guise of a deity, or perhaps the city’s *demos*.171

168 Vermeule & Anderson 1981: 12; Holum 1992a: 59; Kreikenbom 1992: 250, cat. no. V 29.

169 Yeivin 1955: 123.

170 Avi-Yonah 1970: 207; Levine 1975b: 22; Fischer 1996: 258.

171 Vermeule & Anderson 1981: 11; Maderna 1988: 188-189, cat. no. JT 39; Fischer 1998: 145, cat. no.

130 (suggesting identification as the *demos* of the city).

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Fig. 3.21. *Tyche from the Field B peristyle, Caesarea Maritima*

(photo: Aaron Levin, courtesy

of the Combined Caesarea

Expeditions).

Both statues were placed in this new public context in various states of fragmentation as their heads, hands, and various other body parts were missing.

The second episode, which appears to be more or less contemporaneous with the first,

took place in the sixth century in an area of the city known as ‘Field B’, just south of the Byzantine Esplanade. Excavations in this area in 1974 and 1975 revealed a statue in a fragmentary state of preservation (Figs. 3.21-22).172 This was a headless and over-life-size statue of Tyche, the goddess of civic and imperial fortune, that had been installed in the peristyle courtyard of a building whose purpose has not been firmly established.173

There seems to be no evidence to support its recent identification as a lecture hall.174

It is likely that the statue is identifiable with the Tyche of Caesarea that is known from 172 Holum 1992b: 75-79; 2003a: 158-159; 2008: 551-558.

173 Gersht 1984; 1996: 307-309; Wenning 1986; Holum et al. 1988: 10-12; Fischer 1996: 257.

174 *Contra* Holum 2008: 558; and cf. Stirling 2005: 226-227 for a deconstruction of the identification of late antique houses in Athens as philosophers’ schools.

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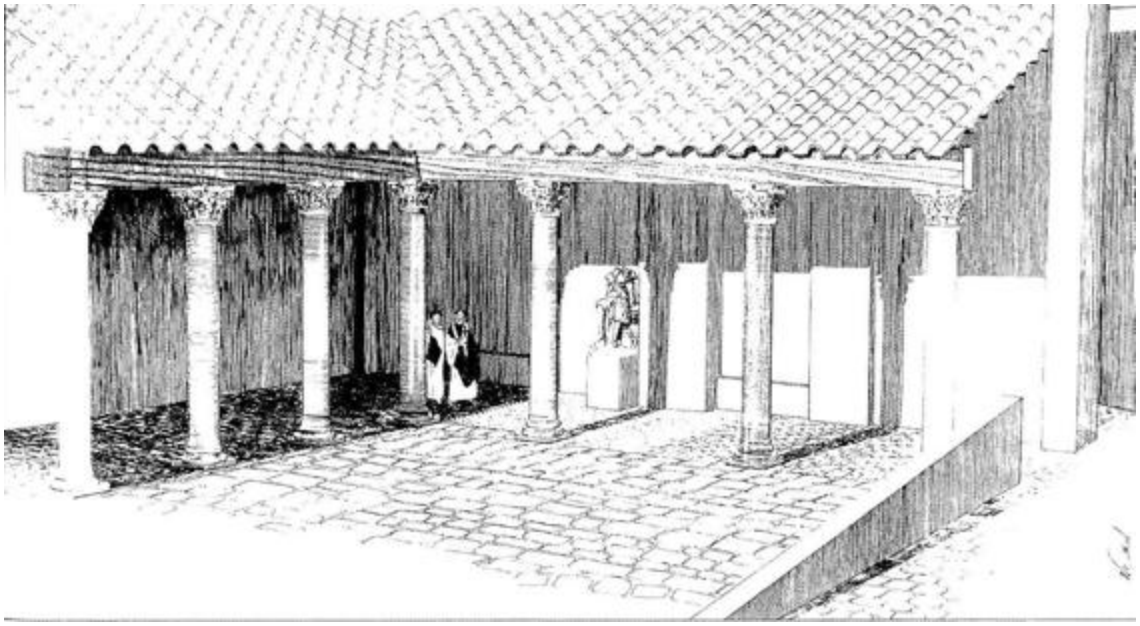

Reconstruction drawing of the Field B peristyle, Caesarea Maritima (courtesy of Anna Iamim and **Fig. 3.22.**

Kenneth Holum / Combined Caesarea Expeditions).

a famous fourth-century cup, now in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris.175 The statue

was found in three pieces that could not be fitted together.176 The Tyche, dating to the second century and perhaps originally placed in Caesarea's Tychaeum, was chosen for

this new setting in the sixth or early seventh century, again seemingly in spite of its fragmentary state of preservation. The leg support, interpreted as a personification of the harbour of Caesarea, was also found headless.

These two episodes, both involving the reuse of century-old headless statues in the

late sixth/seventh-century cityscape of Caesarea, raise a number of questions about

contemporary society, late antique urban life, and the role of memory within it.177

Displayed in a headless state, what meaning would they have had to contemporary

viewers, walking by on their everyday business? How had the statues lost their heads?

What stories could have emerged about their identity and history? Did their display

have an impact of the aesthetic sensibilities of the period? And what does their headless state reveal about attitudes towards the pagan past in late antique Caesarea?

In order to understand these two episodes better, we must look at the afterlife of

the statues at Caesarea step by step. First, how did the Caesarea sculptures lose their heads? It is entirely possible that they had been decapitated at some point during the 175 Holum et al. 1988: 14-15.

176 Holum 2008: 556.

177 A similar case may be found in the early fifth-century display of a (headless?) statue of a satyr at Aizanoi that stood on a base with a third century inscription dedicated to a private citizen, see von Mosch 1995; Jacobs 2010: 276; Rheidt 2010: 15-17. On the archaeological context, see Rheidt 1995, esp. Abb. 8 and 19.

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religious controversies of the fourth and fifth century. At least two of them (the porphyry Hadrian and the marble Jupiter) are likely to have come from cultic contexts,

given their size and iconography, which would have made them especially susceptible

to Christian violence. Their fate may even have been ascribed to a particular bishop or saint, and if still visible in their headless state, they could have reminded viewers of the social power and prestige of the local church, specific saints, or ecclesiastical luminar-ies. The removal of the statues from the original context of display may also represent another attempted act of erasure, but unfortunately nothing is known of the buildings

in which they were originally displayed.178

The sixth-century re-display of the statues in the Byzantine Esplanade and the Field

B peristyle raises some further issues. It came after a period of about a century dur-

ing which many monuments, such as the Temple of Roma and Augustus, had simply

been quarried or left to decay. Partly for this reason, commentators have been keen to see the reuse of the two Classical statues in the Byzantine Esplanade as an example of late antique antiquarianism, even nostalgia.179 To quote Kenneth Holum, in the “sixth

century, urban design at Caesarea was nostalgic and antiquarian – a look back at the

classical past, to a world that was slipping away.”180 While this argument is seductive and their enthroned display certainly suggests a respectful attitude, I would also argue that such statements neglect one important aspect of the workings of memory. The past

never comes back in its original state – just like human memory, it is characterized by its selectiveness and ability to adapt the past for the purposes of the present.181 Thus, unlike Holum and other commentators, I find it especially worthwhile to focus not on

what is present but what is absent in the display of the reused statues at Caesarea. The display of the headless statues may not only have been about longing for a past with

marble sculpture and Classical education (evoked by Holum's identification of the Field B peristyle as a lecture hall). It also relates to living in a present environment of ruination and decay. As Elsner has pointed out in relation to practices of *damnatio memoriae*, there is a need to realize that "the preserved damaged object, in its own material being, signals both its predamaged state – a different past,…and its altered state."182

So, in one sense, the re-display of the statues is a case of a rehabilitation of the pagan past, but only a partial one.183 The statues are not complete, so the past cannot be rehabilitated in its entirety. They are displayed in a fragmentary state, mutilated and bearing clear signs of past violence and religious strife to be interpreted by contemporary viewers.

As such, the fragmented state of the statues on display could hint at a renegotiation of aesthetic sensibilities and attachment to the past in late antique Caesarea. This renegotiation needs to be understood through the eyes of the late antique viewers, whose

178 But see Avi-Yonah's suggestion that it originated in the city's Hadrianeum (1970: 208).

179 See Holum 2003b on the construction of the past in late antique Palestine.

180 Holum et al. 1988: 187.

181 See Hedrick 2000: 86-87.

182 Elsner 2003: 210.

183 Hedrick 2000: 126-130.

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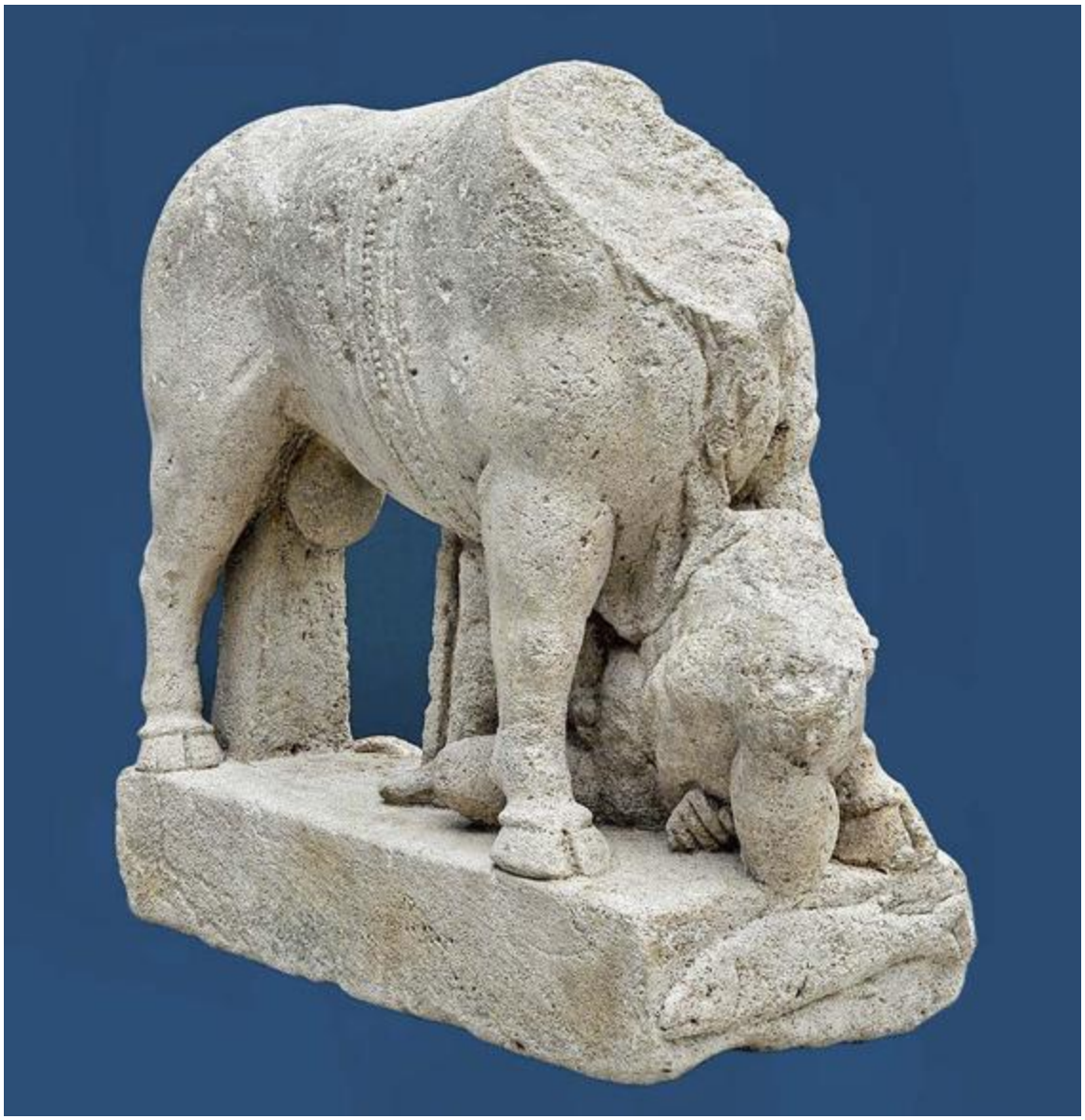

Cult image from the Altbachtal **Fig. 3.23.**

shrine, Trier (photo ©

Rheinisches Landesmuseums

Trier, Th. Zühmer).

daily lives were inhabited by these fragmentary statues. Certainly, the decision (as far as it was a conscious one) not to place heads on the statues must have been significant.

It is also an interesting feature of these statues that they do not bear inscriptions or any other form of textual identification.184 Such inscriptions often featured on statues and gave them a fixed identity. Without an identifying inscription or once an existing one faded, the potential for re-interpretation would have grown.

In their headless state, the statues could have served as signifiers of a Christian 'triumph' and as such conveyed a similar message to Demeas' inscription at Ephesus.185

From a Christian viewpoint it became important to demonstrate that 'idols' were life-

less and manmade rather than animated representations worthy of worship. Display of

'defeated' images for mockery could serve to illustrate this point.186 From the viewpoint of superstition, ritual decapitation was another way of neutralizing the power that was perceived to dwell within an image. At the sanctuary of Altbachtal near Trier, the cult image of a bull was thus left standing after its beheading (Fig. 3.23).187 This would have been a potent reminder to viewers of the victory of Christianity over pagan cult, which could not have been achieved by a complete erasure. Another example of this kind of

Christian attack is a cult image of Mithras from the *Mitreo delle Terme del Mitra* in 184 Holum 2008: 549

185 In another sixth-century episode, idols were hung in the streets of Antioch, see *Acta S. Symenios junioris, Acta Sanctorum, May,* vol. V, p. 371b.

186 Euseb., *Vit. Const.* 3.54.3-6; and see Caseau 2007.

187 Gose 1972: 86; Binsfeld et al. 1988: 209-211; Stewart 2003: 295.

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Fig. 3.24. *Statue of Venus from Trier, Rheinisches Landesmuseums Trier (photo © Rheinisches*

Landesmuseums Trier, Th. Zühmer).

Ostia.188 Heads and arms had here been chopped off in straight lines, both on the fig-

ure of Mithras and on the bull, testimony to the kind of selective destruction that was discussed earlier. Decapitation of the statue of the god was in this case in many ways equated with the decapitation of the god itself. The arms and various other bits and

pieces originating from the statue were disposed of in a sewer, whereas the statue itself was left standing until its excavation in modern times. The find of Christian objects

demonstrates that the building had been reused for Christian purposes. Another at-

tested case of this kind of response is a marble statue of Venus of the Capua type from Trier (Fig. 3.24).189 At a much later date, it had been set up outside the monastery of St. Matthew where it was accompanied by an inscription in both Latin and German.

The inscription, dating to the second half of the 16th century, makes the Venus explain its new role to the viewer: “Do you want to know what I am? I was an idol. When St.

188 Becatti 1954: 29-38; Sauer 2003: 17-19.

189 Förster 1965 (with full transcript of the inscriptions); Wightman 1971: 229; Rheinisches Landesmuseums Trier 1984: 202-203, cat. no. 91; Grammaccini 1996: 41, Abb. 10; Sauer 1996: 92; Stewart 2003: 295.

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Eucharius came to Trier, he destroyed me and took away my honour. I was honoured as a god, now I stand before the world for ridicule."190 According to the local tradition, pilgrims were invited to throw stones at the image. The statue stood in the monastery

until 1811 and can today be seen in its very fragmentary state in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier.

The kind of triumphalism that is described here would have been especially acute

if there were still pagan viewers among those who passed by the statues.191 A similar

interpretation of spoliated pagan inscriptions has been put forward in a study of the

Christianization of Gerasa by Jason Moralee.192 The author observed how the display

of pagan inscriptions, deliberately cut into pieces and placed on the floor in Gerasa's fifth-century church of St. Theodore, became material manifestations of the Christian

triumphalism of the age. Moralee furthermore argues that the "Christians of Gerasa…

viewed the remains of pagan inscriptions as meaningful traces of a defeated past."193 The mutilated inscriptions thus actively served to remember the past in a specific way that suited the local ecclesiastical authorities. It allowed churchgoers to step very literally on the physical remains of the past and the 'errors' of paganism. The movement of churchgoers across these spaces could potentially also remind them of the message of some of the sermons given inside the church. In that sense, the display of fragments signified the triumph of the Christian present over a pagan past that was made harmless by its

incompleteness and inability to obtain coherency. Confronting and conquering this

pagan past then in effect became possible for all Christian viewers, in a similar way to how women, pigs, and other animals were invited to tread on the formerly sacred space

of the Marneion at Gaza after its conversion into a church.194 Again, the strategy here was not to forget the past, but to remember the past in its fragmented and powerless

state for the purposes of the present.

Yet it is also very important to point out that memory in these cases is about more

than the derogatory reuse of pagan images or inscriptions. The state of decay and

fragmentation, the absence of heads and other body parts in the two examples from

Caesarea Maritima, must have made itself present to the viewer. What kind of response

190 My translation from the German version, as printed in Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier 1984: 203: “Wolt ihr wissen was ich bin. Ich bin ein Abgottin. / Da S. Eucharius zu Trier kam, / er mich zerbrach, mein Her abnam. / Ich was geehret als ein Gott. Jetz stehen ich hie hier der Welt zu spot. / Im Jahr 50 nach Christi geburt sein die 3 H. Bischoffe von Rom zu Trier kommen. /

Euc(harius), Val(erius), Mat(ernus).”

191 Reference to a shrine of the imperial cult, a Hadrianeum, is made in an inscription dating to the sixth century. However, as Lee Levine has pointed out, it is unlikely that the building known by that name still

functioned as a pagan place of worship (1975: 21-22). The name simply seems to have stuck.

192 Moralee 2006.

193 Moralee 2006: 183. A similar point is made concerning a second-/third-century frieze with the emblem of Jupiter that was reused as a threshold in old St. Peter's at Rome, see Greenhalgh 2009: 65.

194 Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry*, 76.

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Fig. 3.25. *Inscribed slabs reused in the pavement of the Marienkirche, Ephesus (photo: author).*

could such present absences have prompted? To an extent, it could be said to presage

the *spolia* walls and displays of rather later periods, where broken pieces of statuary would be placed in a seemingly random fashion on walls to achieve an aesthetic of the

fragmentary. This may be observed in the display of the mutilated inscriptions at Gerasa but is even more pertinent in the case of the Atrium pavement in front of the Church

of Mary at Ephesus, where large slabs from the *temenos* of Artemis were reused, with the fragmentary inscriptions facing up (Fig. 3.25). Some of these inscriptions were defaced but still decipherable. While easily seen in pragmatic terms, such developments certainly demonstrate the emergence of a new aesthetic that was based on the juxtaposition of

diverse elements of decoration, and that is also evident in contemporary Christian

churches.

A perhaps more immediate reaction could have been the articulation of stories, as is

evident from the well-known case of the bronze statue of Domitian on the Capitoline

Hill in Rome in the sixth century, mentioned in a passage in Procopius's *Anecdota* or *Secret History*. It is suggestive of the ways in which the display of fragmented or mutilated statues in the cityscape could become the focus of creative (re)interpretation by contemporary viewers. This strange tale can be interpreted as an attempt to account

for the appearance of statues in a fragmentary state of preservation in the cityscape.

The statue in question may have been a late antique reconstruction consisting of parts of several reused statues, a palimpsest of sculptural *spolia*, or perhaps simply a heavily decayed statue with an odd-looking appearance. Domitian had suffered a *damnatio*

memoriae after his violent death, but it is very unlikely that the author in this case was **244**

Chapter 3

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able to confirm whether or not the statue did in fact portray the disgraced emperor.

Rather, it is quite possible that the statue was identified as Domitian exactly because of its mutilated state and awkward appearance. Domitian was considered as the evil

tyrant *par excellence* in Late Antiquity, and was for this reason an obvious candidate for a story of this kind:195

Having collected Domitian's flesh, [Domitia Longina, Domitian's wife] put the

pieces together carefully and fitted them to each other; then she stitched the whole

body together and showed it to the sculptors, asking them to make a bronze statue

portraying the tragic end of the dead man. The artists produced the statue with

no loss of time, and the widow took it and erected it on the street that leads up

to the Capitol, on the right-hand side as you go there from the Forum: it showed

the appearance and tragic end of Domitian, and does so to this day.196

The passage, although unique, is an important piece of evidence for how contemporary

viewers conceptualized the *spolia* and palimpsests that must have become a rather common sight in the cities of Late Antiquity. The missing body parts and the poor state of preservation called for response in the form of a fanciful folktale that took a historical figure as its starting point. The fate of Domitian's body in this story deviates from other historical accounts that tell us that he was cremated and buried on the Quirinal, but

this fact only supports the point being made here.197 The function of a story such as

this is to give meaning to the complex materiality of the world that surrounds us, not to create an accurate historical account. To contemporary viewers, the story about the mutilation of Domitian's body after his death explains the appearance of a statue that they know from their everyday life. It follows that both absences and presences can be powerful forces in the construction of memory.

The inhabitants of Caesarea Maritima must have been confronted with similar is-

sues as those of Rome when they walked down their Street of Statues in the sixth and

seventh centuries. The placement of the ruinous statues made their daily movements

part of the memory politics of the present, and they could be simultaneously reminded

of the powerlessness of pagan cult and its idols and attuned to the signs of the times, including the ruination around them. The question of how the physical remains of the

pagan past should be dealt with was an important one in late antique society, not only at the level of the Church, imperial court, and members of the elite, but also for the 195 On Domitian's *damnatio memoriae*, see Varner 2004: 110.

196 τὰ Δομετιάνου ξυλλεξαμένη κρέα, ξυνθεῖσά τε αὐτὰ ἐς τὸ ἀκριβὲς καὶ ἐναρμοσαμένη ἐς

ἄλληλα κατέρραψε μὲν τὸ σῶμα ὅλον, τοῖς δὲ πλάσταις ἐνδειξαμένη ἐν εἰκόνι χαλκῇ τὸ πάθος

ἀπομιμείσθαι τοῦτο ἐκέλευεν. οἱ μὲν οὖν τεχνῖται τήν εἰκόνα εὐθὺς ἐποίουν. λαβοῦσα δὲ ἡ γυνὴ

ἔστησεν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐς τὸ Καπιτώλιον φερούσης ἀνόδου ἐν δεξιᾷ ἐκ τῆς ἀγορᾶς ἐνταῦθα ἰόντι, εἰδός τε τὸ Δομετιάνου καὶ τὸ πάθος δηλοῦσαν ἐς τόδε τοῦ χρόνου (Procop., *Secret History*, 8.19-20, trans. Williamson & Sarris). See further discussion of this passage in Stewart 1999: 183.

197 Suet. *Dom.* 17.3.

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inhabitants of every urban centre of the Mediterranean. The re-display of statuary in the late antique cityscape of Caesarea reveals one way in which collective memory could be embedded and experienced within urban space. Christian responses to pagan images

were often ambiguous, and the social life of statues in late antique Caesarea Maritima (ranging from violent attack to rehabilitation) as reconstructed here certainly reflects this ambiguity. By following the changing fates of such statuary, we have thus glimpsed the use and reuse of the past in the everyday life of one of the major late antique urban centres of the eastern Mediterranean.

Re-Imagining the Cityscape at Caesarea Philippi

Another evocative story about the public display of a fragmentary statue is known

from Caesarea Philippi.198 The first mention of this particular image, claimed to be a portrait of Christ, is found in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, whose story was repeated by Joh n Malalas in his sixth-century *Chronicle* and later still in the early eighth-century *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*.199 The identification of the statue as Christ in the following quotation must certainly be a creative, misguided re-interpretation of another

figure, but not one that should surprise us. The iconography of Christ built on diverse elements, including those borrowed from Asklepios, Helios, Alexander the Great, and

the Roman emperor.200 But most interestingly, we have a description of the physical

state of this as well as another statue:

Having heard that at Caesarea Philippi…there was a celebrated statue of Christ

which had been erected by a woman whom the Lord had cured of a flow of

blood, Julian commanded it to be taken down and a statue of himself erected;

but a violent fire from heaven fell upon it and broke off the parts contiguous to

the breast…it has stood in that fashion from that day until now, full of the rust

of lightning. The statue of Christ was dragged around the city and mutilated by

the pagans; but the Christians recovered the fragments, and deposited the statue

in the church in which it is still preserved.201

In Sozomen's narrative there are two mutilated statues on display in public spaces; the statue of Julian was vandalized by divine intervention and publicly displayed to mock

his false ways, whereas the fragments of the statue of "Christ" undoubtedly became the centre piece in a local church's collection of sacred objects, perhaps even as part of their holy relics. The display of these two mutilated images thus had two very different meanings for contemporary viewers. The story illustrates well the complex re-interpretations that can take place within a landscape, as well as how these are viewer-dependent.

Philostorgius, whose *Church History* survives only in a later epitome, gives some 198 Wilson 2006; Stewart 2007b: 31-33.

199 Euseb., *Hist. eccl.* 7.18; Joh n Malalas, *Chronicle*, 10.12; *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, 48.

200 Gerke 1948; Mathews 1999: 115-141; Hannestad 1999: 174-180.

201 Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 5.21, trans. Wace & Schaff.

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further information about the physical state of the statue of “Christ”. From his version of the story, we know that the conservation of the statue’s detached head was actually being sought by Christians when pagan factions attacked the image of Christ:

The pagans who lived in Caesarea Philippi when they were roused to impiety in

Julian’s time, tore the statue down from its base, tied ropes to its feet, and dragged it down the main thoroughfare. While they were breaking up and scattering the

rest of the body, some people who were grieved at what was happening managed

secretly to take away the head, which had separated from the neck while being

dragged along, and rescued it as best as they could.202

It is characteristic of both versions of the Caesarea Philippi story and also the example of Domitian’s statue in Rome that they feature historical figures, occasionally bad or misguided characters, in these cases the last pagan emperor Julian Apostate and the

disgraced Domitian. In the *Parastaseis*, it is even claimed that it was Julian himself who broke the image of Christ.203 On the other hand, the reinterpretation of the image as

Christ confirmed its sacredness and furthermore elevated its prestige, even after it was broken.

While the statue of Christ from Caesarea Philippi has not survived in the archaeologi-

cal record, we may add it to a growing corpus of examples of how pagan statues could

be re-interpreted in Late Antiquity and how their display in a fragmented state could

evoke stories and memories, blending history and myth. These stories were part of the

rhetorical field of Christianization alongside other Christian literary fantasies of pagan ruin and the downfall of idols. These fantasies often invoke the memory of Diocletian's persecutions of Christians, such as in the *Encomium of Archbishop Theodore:*

For when I look upon the palace of Diocletian, this murderer of the mighty men

of Antioch, which not under the settled governance of the God-loving Emperor,

and *when I see his places of idols, which are now laid waste,* and which have been made into churches, wherein are ready the Books of the Gospels, and when I see

his throne of lawlessness, which hath been removed from under him, and his

bedchamber of lawlessness, which hath been destroyed, I exclaim 'Well it is that

the pride of that arrogant man Diocletian hath been abased, and that there hath

been raised up for us this humble and God-loving Emperor Constantine, who

hath remembered his fellowship with them and his rank of General, and that the

throne of Antioch hath been bestowed upon him!'204

202 Philostorgius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.3, trans. Amidon, slightly modified.

203 *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, 48.

204 *Encomium of Archbishop Theodore*, fol. 4 b 1, ed. Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, my emphasis. Other Christian authors on ruins: Jerome, *Ep.* 107; Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 7.6.

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From this perspective, decay and ruination were part of a creative process that articulated the materiality of images, whether complete or incomplete. It is not difficult to imagine how such stories could have emerged, and they could have been told and re-told in

the lived, everyday encounters with fragmented statues in the cityscapes of Caesarea

Philippi, Caesarea Maritima, and other urban centres of Late Antiquity.

In the case study of Caesarea Maritima, the display of fragmented statues became an

important feature of the late antique cityscape that was not merely "nostalgic" or "antiquarian." The responses of viewers would have been based on the social and religious climate of the period, especially the influence of Christianity, but the most immediate impression of the statues must have been their physical state. The broken statues could be perceived by Christians as triumphal monuments, degrading reminders of a pagan

past, or simply as decaying monuments that evoked stories about their fall and the

state of the material world. Re-interpretation and re-identification would have become possible for all viewers who passed by the statues.

It is also clear that the statues would have been appreciated for their artistic beauty, even in their fragmentary form. Scholars of Late Antiquity have long taken an interest in the physical state of buildings and other monuments. Taking a similar interest in

the materiality of sculpture may add further knowledge to our understanding of civic

life in this time of important religious and social change across the Mediterranean. The fact that many of these pagan sculptures were displayed in the urban spaces of these

Near Eastern cities is also important as this context allowed for a much larger degree of re-interpretation, since they could be imagined as devoid of any cultic significance.

This takes us back to the point made in Chapter 1, namely that cult statues can only

be regarded as such when placed within their original context in temples.

The End of the 'Statue Habit' in the Near East: Pagan

Statues and Bathing Culture at Hammat Gader

In this chapter, I have discussed archaeological finds of sculpture as well as textual sources that relate to a number of cities in order to elucidate the variety of Christian responses to pagan statuary that can be found in the late antique Near East, with special emphasis on urban space. Palmyra and Scythopolis offered contrasting views of Christian response in two environments of urban continuity. At Palmyra, the statue of Allat/Athena fell

victim to religious violence in the late fourth century because of its intricate role in pagan visual practices. The responses at Scythopolis were more ambiguous due to the liminal

contexts that the excavated statues were displayed in. The sculptures from the Eastern Bathhouse and comparative material from other sites showed how such statues were

allowed to stand at least into the early fifth century, although sometimes in a mutilated or modified form that suited contemporary attitudes towards the nude body. At some

time after this, but before 515/516, attitudes changed and the sculptures were deposited in the hypocaust of the bathhouse, which was quickly built over. At Caesarea Maritima and Caesarea Philippi, I looked at how such pagan statues could be embedded in

material narratives of Christian triumphalism into the second half of the sixth century.

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Yet this evidence also points to the continued importance of sculptural display, even of fragmentary statues, and notions of urban space and civic embellishment. As a whole,

the case studies presented here testify to the chronological development of Christian

response in the Near East from the fourth to the sixth century.

Discussion of one final site will allow us to put this evidence into a wider perspective, even if it extends the chronological boundaries set up for the

purposes of the present study. At Hammat Gader, site of a hot spring and medicinal baths in the territory of

Gadara, it is possible to follow the changing responses not only to pagan statues but also to bathing culture at large up until the eighth century.205 A Roman-style bathhouse was built here in the middle of the second century. The site's international fame is evident from its inclusion in the writings of, amongst others, the church historian Eusebius and the fourth-century sophist Eunapius.206 Even more evocative is the very large corpus of Greek devotional inscriptions that are concentrated in a room that was dubbed the Hall of Inscriptions by the excavators.207 In some of these inscriptions, Hammat Gader is

referred to as a sacred place (*agios topos*) of healing. As we saw in the case of Scythopolis, bathing culture also thrived in other parts of the region during this late period.

Hammat Gader's late antique history is marked by two very different Christian

responses. Epiphanius of Salamis, writing in the second half of the fourth century,

condemned it as a place of wantonness and black magic.208 Yet in spite of this response, pilgrims continued to visit the site, leaving devotional inscriptions on its walls. The best-known of these was inscribed on behalf of the empress Eudoxia, wife of Theodosius II, who settled in Jerusalem in 442/443 and lived there until her death in 460. The inscription is typical of the religious climate of the period, as it merged both Christian and pagan elements.209 This carefully inscribed, monumental inscription, almost 2 m

in length, mentions a list of names that may refer to statues (which may well have been re-identified in the Christian context) that adorned the baths at Hammat Gader, or

perhaps designated different rooms in the baths: Elijah the Prophet is mentioned, as

well as Hygieia, and the sea-nymph Galatia.210 A small number of later inscriptions can be dated to the Umayyad period, when some of the crosses in the earlier inscriptions

were defaced.211 Finally, the sanctuary and its associated baths came to an abrupt end in an earthquake in 749.

The find of a small number of sculptures in the baths at Hammat Gader adds to this

complex picture of late antique change and continuity. A pool in the large Area D was

205 The full publication of Hammat Gader is Hirschfeld 1997. See also Hirschfeld & Solar 1981; Green

& Tsafrir 1982; Di Segni 1992 (epigraphy); Hirschfeld & Cohen 1992 (architectural reconstruction).

206 Hirschfeld 1997: 4-5.

207 On the Greek inscriptions, see Hirschfeld 1997: 185-266. On the architecture of the Hall of Inscriptions, see ibid.: 73-79.

208 *Panarion*, 30, 7-8; and see Hirschfeld 1997: 185.

209 On the poem, see Green & Tsafrir 1982; Hirschfeld 1997: 228-233, no. 49.

210 Elijah: l. 10. Hygieia: l. 12. Galatia: l. 11.

211 Hirschfeld 1997: 267-278. For mutilated crosses, see ibid.: 204-205, no. 20.

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Fig. 3.26. *Female draped statue from the Hammat Gader*

baths (after Hirschfeld 1997: pl. VI, courtesy of

the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem)

lined by a series of 28 fountains, each decorated with reliefs of human and animal faces, dating to the fourth or fifth century.212 These figural representations were systematically mutilated at some uncertain time. The excavators noted that the heads appeared to

have been buried together, adding the intriguing suggestion that they had been placed

on shelves and were then buried when the baths were destroyed in the earthquake in

749.213

In the Hall of Inscriptions two further sculptural finds were made. One is a small

statue of a naked male figure, perhaps Hercules.214 It was found headless and heavily

battered in a channel that ran across the hall. This channel was dated to the Umayyad

period.215 The statue must therefore have been mutilated and deposited sometime before the middle of the eighth century. The other sculptural find from this area is a draped 212 Hirschfeld 1997: 442-446; Fischer 1998: 153.

213 Hirschfeld 1997: 442; see also Tsafrir 2008: 131; and note especially the criticism of Schick, that

"[t]he excavators at Hammat Gader attribute the damage to the Abbasids during the last-phase renovations of the baths, but this seems more an assumption on their part than a demonstrable fact" (1995: 200).

214 Hirschfeld 1997: 459-461. For a photograph of the statue as found, see ibid.: 151, fig. 227.

215 Hirschfeld 1997: 151; and see Hirschfeld & Solar 1981: 217.

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female statue, again headless (Fig. 3.26).216 It was found alongside two columns and the pedestal that may once have supported it. The excavators have suggested that the

statue was hidden as a safety measure, or alternatively that it had been defaced in the round of iconoclasm that ravaged the region in the first half of the eighth century.217

The latter seems the most likely option, given its headless state.

Hammat Gader demonstrates the complexity of late antique responses to sculpture

in the Near East, covering the period from early Christianity to later Islamic times.

While many of the sculptural finds demonstrate once again the chronological problems

involved in this study, they attest to the longevity not only of the sculptural tradition but also of bathing culture, at least into the eighth century. The fountains in Area D

were decorated with reliefs perhaps as late as the fifth century, only later to be defaced.

The statues that were found in the Umayyad layers must at the same time have been

on display until the eighth century.

That marble statuary was available for reuse at this very late date is also evident

from the well-preserved head of a statuette that was found reused as fill in a wall in the Umayyad palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar, which was begun in 724 and destroyed by

an earthquake in 743.218 It may have come from the ruins of a nearby villa. In spite of almost three centuries of legislation and Christian rhetoric, pagan sculpture was still used and reused in new contexts up until this time. This is one further reminder that

pagan idols could be re-imagined by Christian viewers and given new roles and mean-

ings in the social life of the late antique city.

216 Hirschfeld 1997: 456-458. For a photograph of the statue as found, see ibid.: 148, fig. 219.

217 Hirschfeld 1997: 148-149.

218 On Khirbat al-Mafjar, see Hamilton 1959. Most of the sculptural decoration (including scantily clad women) is now in the Rockefeller Museum, East Jerusalem, with further fragments in the Amman Archaeological Museum. On the head of Athena/Minerva, see Merker 1987; Friedland 2008: 343, cat. no. 10. On the late antique and Islamic reuse of marble from villas, see Greenhalgh 2009: 176-182.

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CONCLUSION

Christian Response and the Viewing Culture of Late Antiquity

"…what we know through art is felt in our bones and nerves and muscles as well as grasped by our minds"

Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (1969: 259)

The present study has attempted to excavate meaning from episodes of Christian response to pagan sculpture between the fourth and the seventh centuries with special attention to the textual and archaeological sources from the eastern Mediterranean. It opened with a discussion of one individual, Demeas, who commemorated his destruction (or at least removal from view) of a statue of Artemis in a publicly displayed inscription at Ephesus, most likely in the second half of the fifth century. He thus placed himself within a Christian tradition of triumphalism that can also be observed in other textual sources of the period and which have profoundly affected scholarly conceptions of the process of religious change all the way up until the present day. The remaining part of the book, however, aimed to move beyond this highly rhetorical trope in order to understand the wider social and religious context in which Demeas' response was situ-ated. This approach revealed a wide range of local traditions and snapshots into the life histories of individual statues in the sacred and urban spaces

of Egypt and the Near East.

In this conclusion, I shall first outline the arguments of the preceeding chapters and finally discuss some of their broader implications in light of the issues of representation and response that were introduced in the early part of the book.

Chapter 1 investigated the parallel practices of making and breaking images in Roman

religion and argued that these two topics should be discussed in close dialogue. Dis-

cussions of the role of images in cult had been a recurrent theme in philosophy and

literature that preceded Late Antiquity, and Christian arguments in many cases fol-

lowed already-established critiques of visual practices and *superstitio*. However, these had always been controversial, and even though Christian authors sometimes took great

care to distance themselves from such comparisons, their responses need to be looked

at from the wider perspective of the sculptural landscape of the Roman world and the

different attitudes to divine representation. Many Christian responses also followed a traditional vein in Roman attitudes towards cult images, as they attributed particular powers to them and the representation of divine bodies. Cult images operated within

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a system of visual practices that fed off the conflation of material categories, and three-dimensionality frequently presented viewers with an uncomfortable realness that time

and again became a contested issue in religious discussions of visual practices.

More broadly, I put forward the suggestion that there is much to be gained in mov-

ing beyond contemporary discussions of the ontological status of images and exploring

the physical environment and materiality of cult statues as they can be studied through archaeology. Classical archaeology too may benefit from developments in neighbouring

disciplines that have tackled the issue of divine representation much more explicitly

from the perspective of materiality. In the case of the Circus Maximus Mithraeum in

Rome, it was evident that divine presence was successfully orchestrated by means of

a complex interplay of images, ritual, space, light, and sound. A highly charged ritual environment was similarly apparent in the case of the Syrian sanctuary on the Janiculum, where evidence for some intriguing visual practices, such as the consecration and deposition of cult images, could be observed. Such practices were both ridiculed and

feared by Christians.

In Late Antiquity, discussions of visual practices moved into the mainstream under

the influence of Christianity and became a constituent component not only of anti-

pagan polemic but also of the struggle for hegemony in cities across the Roman world.

Before legislation that outlawed the worship of images was put into place, Christian

apologists had for almost two centuries attacked the visual practices that were crucial to Roman religion. Yet neither legislation nor apologists were successful in countering the widely held views that cult statues could be powerful and potentially dangerous.

Christian demonology in Late Antiquity was thus frequently centred on idols and the

dangers that they posed. This fear of demonic presences in pagan images in turn fuelled many Christian responses to them in a range of different contexts.

The destruction of images nevertheless always posed problems for the authorities

and was never as straightforward as many sources imply. As the legislation in the Theodosian Code attests, it was positively discouraged except in cases where pagan images

were worshipped as idols. In the early fifth century, the Egyptian abbot Shenoute was

even prosecuted for his iconoclastic activities and disturbances to the public order in Upper Egypt. The authorities emphasized that the Christianization of pagan temples

and removal of cult images was to be carried out in an orderly fashion. This observa-

tion necessitated close discussion of the chronology and agency of Christian responses, both topics of vital importance in understanding the specific contexts in which acts of destruction took place. These cannot simply be explained with reference to legislation or biblical scripture, given that early Christianity developed its own set of visual practices over the course of Late Antiquity (and as we saw, not even Shenoute was an advocate

of aniconism). A number of different motives for Christian destruction of pagan idols

were thus explored. Among these, the motives of conversion, etiology, and exorcism

were especially important and can be identified in a variety of textual sources. There was clearly a lot of mileage in early Christian narratives of iconoclasm that made them important rhetorical tools for anti-pagan polemic as well as for the self-representation of Christian communities, martyrs, and holy men. The destruction of idols was a par-254

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ticularly powerful way of emphasizing the intensity of the moment of conversion, not dissimilar to the apostle Paul’s vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Chapter 1 also discussed the methodological basis of the interpretations of the ar-

chaeological record put forward in subsequent chapters. Whereas the use of the late

antique textual sources are often marred with their own set of interpretative issues,

especially their Christian biases and reliance on topoi which may have very little to do with any given historical reality, there are considerable methodological difficulties in interpreting fragments of sculpture from archaeological contexts that frequently come

from old excavations and are in many cases poorly published. In particular, issues of

chronology and agency provide considerable problems of interpretation that need to

be confronted in each individual case.

Yet in spite of these shortcomings and pitfalls, the relevant archaeological material is essential to nuance the written sources in a number of important ways; taken together, the two types of evidence provide a more informative image of Christian responses to

pagan images in Late Antiquity than either could do alone. I therefore proposed one

particular area in which closer attention to sculptural finds in the archaeological record helps us to understand what specific Christian responses reveal of contemporary visual practices and ontologies of the image. The framework of selective destruction, that is the targeting of specific parts of images, may link responses to images with contemporary

treatments of the body, especially in relation to punishment and discipline, as well as a range of other socio-cultural issues. The framework was first applied in an attempt

to understand the treatment of a bust of Germanicus, now in the British Museum,

that had also been marked with a Christian cross on its forehead. Selective destruction makes the study of Christian response an important source for the wider exploration

of visual practices in the Roman world, and the making and breaking of cult images

can thus be explored together. In particular, Christian responses to the particular body parts of sculptural representations, as they can be observed in the archaeological record, unravel important clues to how images were perceived in contemporary society, even

in the case of those images that we traditionally do not classify as divine or belonging to the category of cult statues.

Chapter 2 turned to the regional context of Egypt and looked at how Christians in

this part of the Mediterreanean responded to pagan images, paying particular attention to the transformation of sacred spaces. To understand these responses, I first presented a discussion of visual practices as they can be observed in the rich sculptural landscape of Egypt. These are testimony to a long-lived regional tradition that has implications for the way in which Christian responses are interpreted. The discussion of Alexandria furthermore allowed me to compare the textual and archaeological narratives within

that particular local context. Whereas the textual sources frequently present a picture of Alexandria as a hotbed of pagan-Christian conflict during this period, the archaeology demonstrated a wide range of responses to the images that were part of both the sacred and urban cityscape. Triumphalism in the vein of Demeas' inscription at Ephesus could

be identified among the texts: for example, we learn that a statue from the Serapeum

was displayed for the purpose of mockery, according to Socrates Scholasticus, who also Christian Response and the Viewing Culture of Late Antiquity

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tells us that other bronze images were melted down and reused in a very pragmatic way as utensils for Alexandria's churches. Other images required emphatic neutralization

through the ritual practices of destruction and cross-marking. The cult image from the Serapeum was cut into pieces that were distributed throughout the city and then burnt, in order to announce publicly the fall of this important sanctuary and to negate the

embodied state of the divinity. This act of dismemberment was mirrored some 25 years

later in the mutilation of Hypatia's body, thus demonstrating how Christian responses

were shaped by the juxtaposition of stone bodies and flesh and blood bodies in repre-

sentational culture. As such, interpretations of the Christian rhetoric of idolatry could also be extended by discussions of pagan bodies in the flesh.

The investigation of Christian responses to pagan sculpture in the Nile Valley looked

at the individual cases of Abydos, Dendara, Luxor, Karnak, and Western Thebes. These

case studies facilitated a closer investigation of local circumstances and consequently presented a very diverse picture of late antique Christian response in Egypt, which often incorporated pragmatism and an apparent willingness to appropriate pagan sacred space.

The discussion of these sites was pre-empted by a survey of the most important Egyptian sources that give accounts of the destruction of pagan

images. The majority of these

sources belong to the problematic genres discussed in Chapter 1 that built heavily on

conventional topoi and Christian fantasies of destruction . They often present Christian and pagan groups in fierce opposition, especially in the countryside. They furthermore construct a heavily stereotyped caricature of pagan idolatry, especially in the case of the hagiography of Macarius of Tkôw. The reality on the ground was in all likelihood more

complex; where destruction can be identified, it is once again selective, targeting parts of images that were deemed to be powerful or still part of the pagan cultic imagination.

Most striking is the fact that Christian appropriation of pagan sacred space was very

common. The Theban temples and tombs offer rich evidence of how Christian occupants

understood such reuse and how they responded to different parts of the mythological

imagery that surrounded them in their everyday lives.

The final part of the chapter presented a detailed discussion of the phenomenon of

selective destruction in the context of the Egyptian evidence. I argued that the targeting of specific body parts (of images) could be linked to specifically Egyptian conceptions of the afterlife and the body as well as contemporary methods of bodily punishment

and discipline, which provided a means for understanding the semantics of Christian

responses within the broader context of visual practices. Although some of these prac-

tices are unique to Egypt, recent work in other areas and disciplines has shown that the notion of embodied images also resonates in many other contexts, although the specific meanings will always depend on the cultural context in which they are found.

Chapter 3 focused on Christian responses as they can be identified in texts and

archaeology relating to the urban spaces of the late antique Near East. Starting from a discussion of the visual practices of this region, I moved on to Palmyra and Scythopolis, both prosperous urban centres in Late Antiquity whose archaeological study benefits

from a comprehensive level of documentation, not least by means of recent excavations

by Polish and Israeli scholars. At Palmyra, it was clear that at the end of the fourth **256**

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century Christians attacked both images and other artefacts related to pagan sacrifice in the Temple of Allat, including an altar and an over-life-size statue of Athena that was subjected to selective destruction. In the case of Scythopolis, distinctive phases of Christian response could be identified. Within the liminal environment of the bathhouse, a

first round of modifications of parts of statues deemed to be unsuitable for display by the new Christian hegemony of the body possibly dates to the late fourth century. This was followed in the fifth and sixth centuries by more decisive acts of forgetting and a more direct break with the past, when several statues were deposited in the hypocaust of the abandoned Eastern Bathhouse. The Western Bathhouse, on the other hand, which

appears not to have been decorated with statuary, continued to be visited and embellished by local donors until a major eighth-century earthquake. The final deposition of statuary in the Eastern Bathhouse can be juxtaposed with other developments in the theatre

and odeon of Scythopolis, demonstrating that pagan sculpture in liminal settings was

especially problematic for Christian viewers and authorities. However, the category of figural art in other media was not controversial. In many other contexts in Scythopolis, including the early sixth-century Sigma and the mid-sixth-century Monastery of the

Lady Mary, figural representation and mythological subject matter was embraced by

the Christian community. A similar chronological development in Christian response

had earlier been identified at Gaza, although only through textual sources.

Part of the urban transformation of the late antique Near East involved a renegotia-

tion of the public display of statuary that had been such a crucial component of Roman urbanism and social patronage. In the final part of chapter 3, I considered the physical state of statuary in Caesarea Maritima and what this form of sixth-century display of

fragmentary, pagan statues may reveal about changing conceptions of memory, meaning,

and aesthetics in the late antique cityscape and its decorative scheme. I argued that as efforts to mend or rework broken statues became less *de rigueur*, new meanings emerged, not least in light of the processes of Christianization that reshaped many aspects of

contemporary society. What we are witnessing in Caesarea Maritima is thus not simply

cultural decline – nostalgia for a lost golden age – but two attempts to rework the physical fabric of the city to fit the sensibilities of the present. The two broken statues that were re-displayed could have been interpreted and re-imagined in a variety of ways by

viewers as they moved through this ‘memoryscape’, perhaps even inspiring the kind of

stories about fragmentary statues that are known from historical sources in the cases of Rome and Caesarea Philippi. In the latter case, there is additionally evidence to suggest that some statues were re-interpreted as representations of Christ and even became the centre of pilgrimage activities, thus providing a powerful new locus of memory in the

sacred landscape of the Near East.

This process of re-imagining idols in the late antique cityscape, which involved the

display of fragmentary and spoliated statues in new contexts, allows for a study of the changing relationship between the (pagan) past and the (Christian) present. This in turn highlighted the need for a more thorough investigation of the materiality of statuary, just as late antique scholars have focused on decay and ruination in the archaeological record. We may speculate whether these profound changes to the urban fabric led to

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the emergence of new aesthetical sensibilities that have been more firmly established within the study of late antique architecture.

Comparing the different responses in the urban spaces of the Near East with those

of the sacred spaces in Egypt, it becomes clear that Christian communities in both

spheres constructed highly stereotyped visions of pagan idolatry and the characteristics of its rituals. However, responses within sacred spaces were always more targeted, given the potential that cult images in these contexts offered for sacrifice and worship. Both texts and archaeological evidence suggest that cult images set up within sacred spaces and clearly in use as objects of worship were most susceptible to Christian attacks.

These responses contributed to the establishment of Christian hegemony and promoted

Christian control of civic spaces. This was, for example, an important lesson learned

from the investigation of Demeas' inscription, which was placed in the busy intersection of Ephesus' most important late antique thoroughfare, the Curetes Street.

The sculptural landscape of Roman sanctuaries and the viewing culture of which they

were part have been a focal point throughout this study, because the particularities of this context are essential in understanding the background to later Christian responses.

Although the primary focus of the study has been Late Antiquity, this wider frame of

reference contributes to a greater sense of continuity between the Roman and Christian contexts. This was particularly clear in the case of the fourth-century phases of the

so-called Syrian sanctuary on Janiculum, where specific traits of later visual practices can be identified, although it must be noted that the interpretation of this sanctuary is anything but clear-cut.

Through consideration of both the textual and archaeological sources, this book has

attempted to demonstrate how Christian responses to pagan sculpture were part of a

rhetorical field of Christianization in Late Antiquity, while at the same time constituting a very real part of the complex religious and social politics of the period. It has been argued that centuries-old pagan statues (as well as relief sculpture) were part of a transformative process that resulted in a re-ordering of both urban and sacred space in the Near East and Egypt respectively. Christian responses thus encompass much more

than mindless violence; they need to be contextualized against social and political developments, and not least further consideration of visual practices.

These discussions of Christian response have hopefully highlighted a specific need

to address the terminology that is used when working with sculptural fragments in

the archaeological record. They have also demonstrated that closer scrutiny of this

evidence allows for a better understanding of how Christians not only *viewed* images and wrote about them in abstract and distanced ways (for example, as generic idols or, more positively, as the subjects of *ekphrases*), but also engaged with images in a more direct fashion, sometimes resulting in acts of mutilation, destruction, or transformation. The more violent responses that we have observed in this book thus go beyond

the category of viewing (or looking, seeing, *etc.* , all verbs that emphasize a conceptual distance between objects and human agents) that has otherwise been established as one

of the chief interpretive tools in Classical art history today. Importantly, the concept of viewing distances images from human viewers and de-emphasizes their material prop-258

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erties – the fact that they are objects that can be physically handled. There must be a focus on object as well as on vision. The approach taken in this book, however, owes

much to scholarship in the field of viewing that stresses the importance of locating the social factors which motivated particular responses, and how response can be studied

as a meaning-bearing category in Roman visual practices. I have here tried to argue

that the history of response should be historically situated and grounded in specific

case studies of regional contexts. What this particular study can offer to the broader history of response, then, is a greater sense of the historical and cultural complexity of late antique viewing culture that furthermore has important implications for the history of Christian art and the role that materiality played in visual practices in Antiquity.

Lastly, the discussions of Christian response that have been presented here add a

series of layers to the life histories of Roman sculpture and its changing fate over the centuries. These episodes of Christian response are

instrumental in our understanding

of the physical and conceptual state of the incredibly rich and diverse sculptural record from Antiquity that has survived to the present. On an even more fundamental level,

they also help us to unravel a late antique viewing culture that while demonstrating

similarities and continuities with the Roman period, also consciously diverged from it in significant ways, paving the way for new conceptions of visual culture in the medieval period.

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Codex Theodosianus

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CIL

Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum

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LTURS Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae Subur-

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